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COUNTRY

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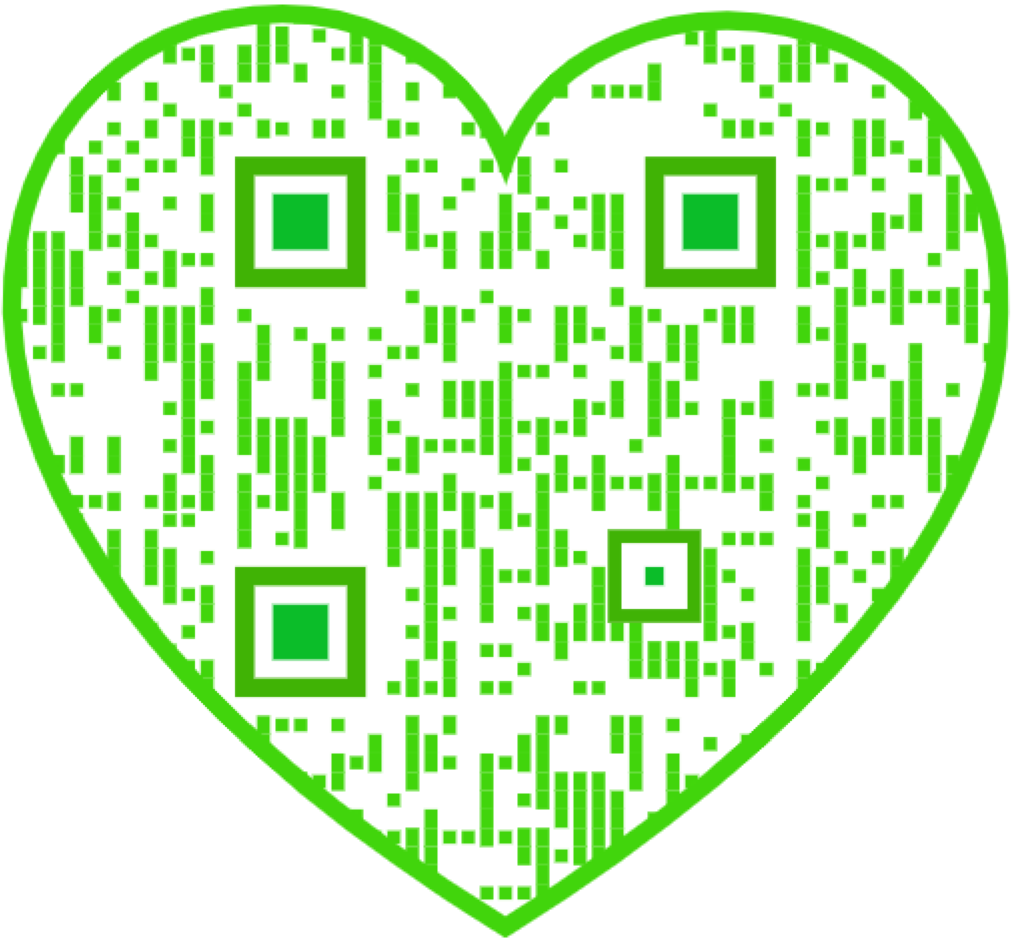
AT HOME ON A CHRISTMAS TREE FARM

THE GARDEN AT CONVICT-BUILT DENBIGH

- A CONVERTED INN IN THE MACEDON RANGES
- DOWN BY A BILLABONG ON MOBLE STATION

UNIVERSAL MEDIACO
DEC / JAN 2025
NO. 168 VOL. 27 NO. 6
AUS $11.95* NZ $8.90
(both incl. GST)
ISSN: 1323 - 9708



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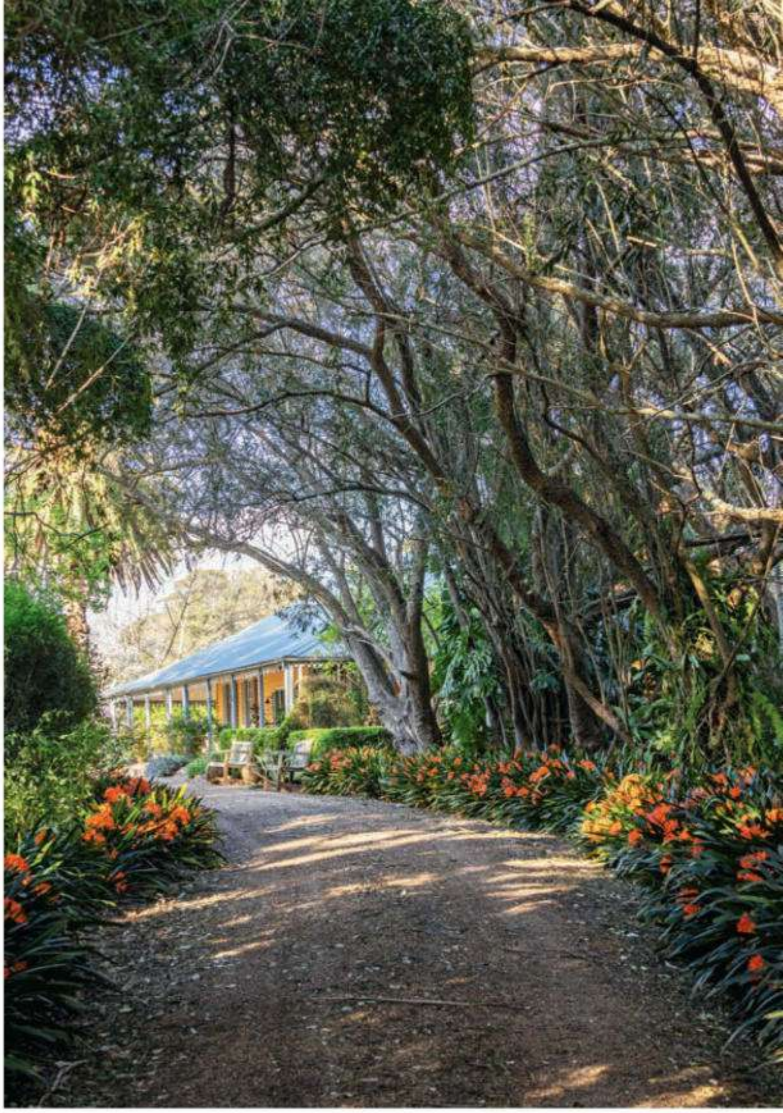

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editor's letter

As we go to press, photographer Ken Brass and I are just back from a trip through country NSW to south-western Queensland's Channel Country, which inspired the travel story for this issue. It's been a timely reminder of the amazing rewards that are out there for travellers who are prepared to venture a little off the beaten track and get to know some of the hardworking and dedicated people who live there. It's also been a great opportunity to see the remarkable standards many people in the hospitality industry are achieving in this part of the world. Many of them also run grazing or other businesses and they are working hard, and collaboratively, to promote their region. So a huge shout out to shearers' cook turned chef Fiona Ferguson and her partner, Adam Walker, at Toogunna Plains station, Dan and Louise Hoch at The Lake at Quilpie, the Rutledge family of Moble station, publican Peieta Mills, who's brought a touch of glamour to Cunnamulla's Club Boutique Hotel, and Kate and Stuart Bowen and their daughter, Lauren, and her husband, Sean Bond, who have rescued the Toompine Hotel, the pub with no town, between Quilpie and Thargomindah.

I'm not quite sure where this year has gone, but thanks to everyone who has taken the time to write or email. Your messages of support and appreciation mean much to us and we're truly grateful for your kind words and suggestions. I hope you and your families have a very happy festive season and that you will enjoy the break and the chance to catch up with relatives and friends.

I also wish you all the best for the new year. I hope that 2025 is a good one for all and delivers plenty of opportunities to catch up with some of you on the road. I also hope that *Australian Country* continues to provide a pleasant diversion and look forward to your company for the next issue, which goes on sale at the beginning of February.

Australian Country cover photo by KEN BRASS

Kirsty

Kirsty McKenzie, editor
kmckenzie@umco.com.au

helping out on this issue ...

KIM SELBY

PHOTOGRAPHER

Kim is a multi-award-winning family, wedding and commercial photographer. She is best known for her natural and emotion-filled lifestyle photography. She loves being able to capture those special little moments that abound in everyday life and knowing people will be looking back at their photos in years to come. She lives in the Macedon Ranges with her husband and two beautiful boys.

ANASTASIA CASEY

WRITER & EDITOR

Anastasia's passion is to see the world and tell the tales of the people (and animals) she meets along the way. She has worked in publishing for more than 10 years as an editor, writer and sub-editor and, until recently, was working for NewsUK in London. She is currently enjoying being home in Australia.

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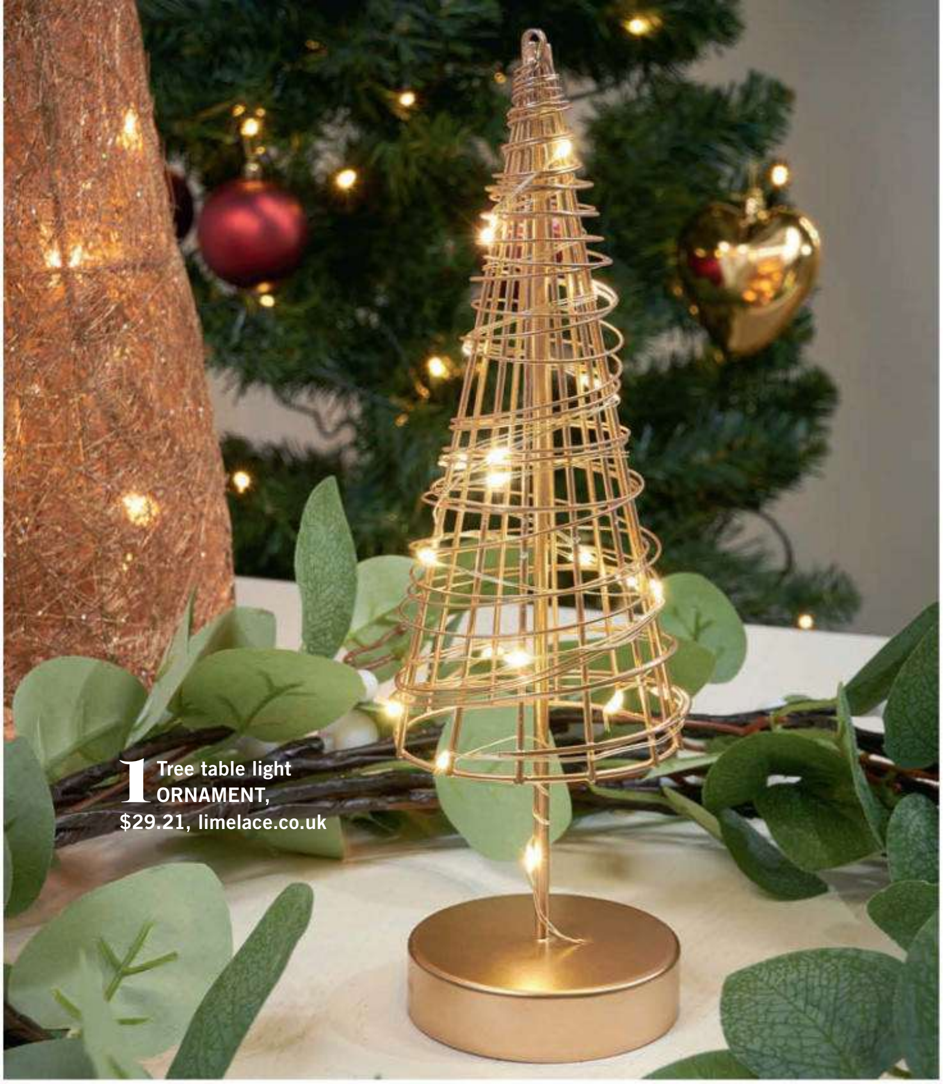
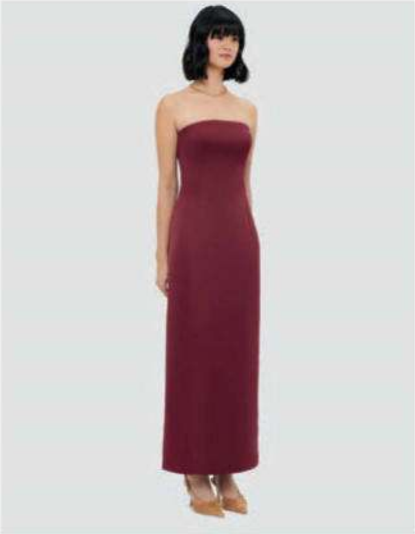


1 Tree table light ORNAMENT, $29.21, limelace.co.uk

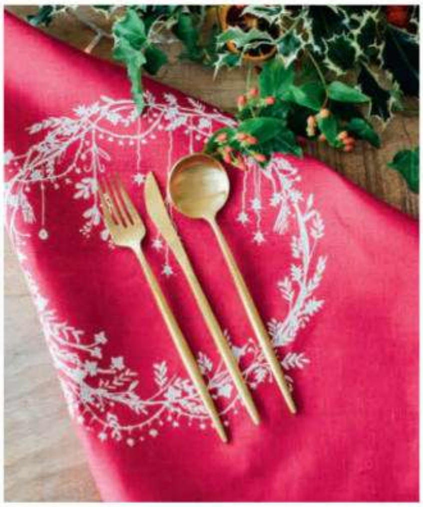
baker's dozen

EMBRACE THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS, WHERE THE JOY OF THE SEASON AND THE WARMTH OF COMMUNITY CREATE UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS TOGETHER.

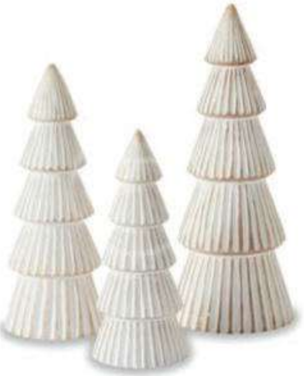
COMPILED BY STEPHANIE ZHANG



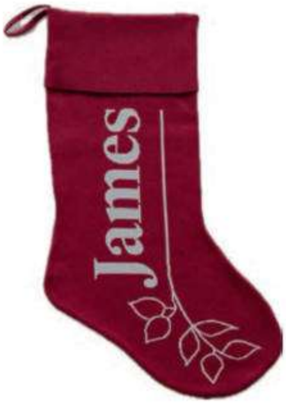
2 Rayna bustier MAXI DRESS in burgundy, $799, leolinofficial.com.au



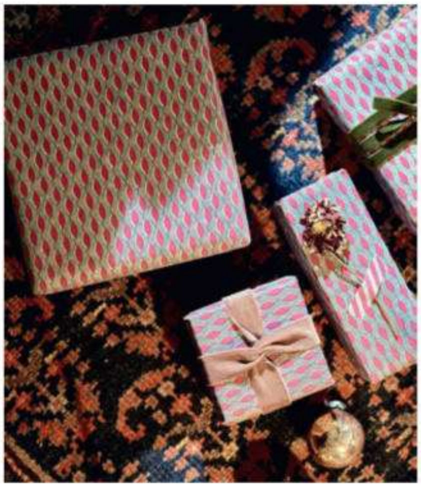
3 Red Christmas linen NAPKINS with festive wreath design, $54.53, helenround.com



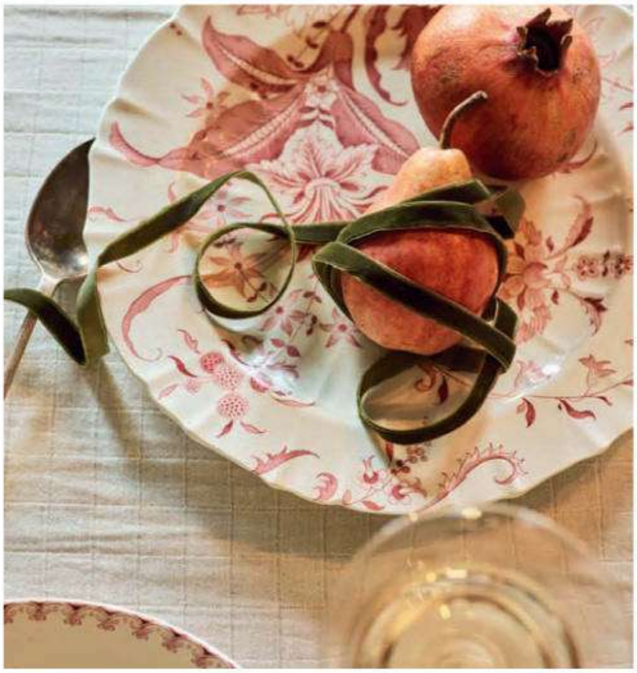
4 Ceramic Christmas trees, $79.95 for a set of three, madraslinkonline.com.au



5 The Noel Santa STOCKING, $99, minimotif.com



6 Handmade WRAPPING PAPER in cranberry stripe, $23.50 for a set of three, rowenandwren.co.uk



7 Velvet RIBBON in sage, $17.60 for 500cm, rowenandwren.co.uk

8 Santa Baby SANTA SACK, $129, minimotif.com

Ho Ho
Lenny
santa baby
Ho

9 LED three pack of CANDLES in warm white, $44.95, beaconlighting.com.au

10 HUSKEECUP in natural, $37 for four, huskee.co

11 Men's pattern crew SOCKS, $9.99, bonds.com.au

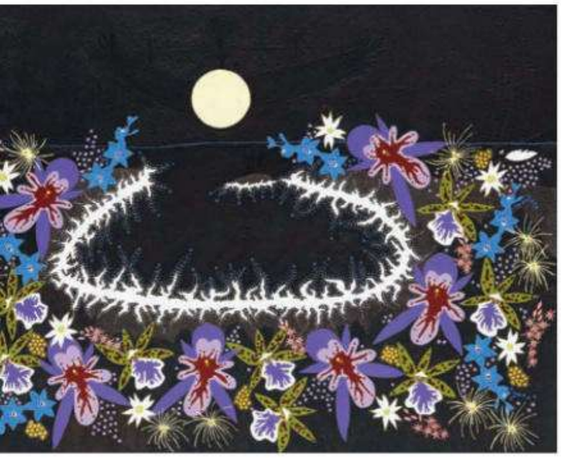
12 Garden Party collection white floral MUG, $32, carladinnage.com.au

13 Gluten-free Christmas turkey in a Christmas recipe CARD SET, $24, sarahurban.com.au

diary notes

COMPILED BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE

MAKE A DATE TO CELEBRATE THESE DIVERSE EVENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY.



NOW–FEBRUARY 9, 2025 (NSW)

Bagan Bariwariganya

Bundanon is hosting Bagan Bariwariganya: Echoes of Country, an exhibition of new works created by Walbunja/Ngarigo artist Aunty Cheryl Davison, Gweagal/Wandiwandian artist Aunty Julie Freeman and Wiradyuri/Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones. Celebrating local stories and upholding local Aboriginal values and kinships, this major collaboration between the renowned First Nations artists will feature large-scale installations, a 75-metre-long mural and new paintings, as well as significant cultural objects. bundanon.com.au

JANUARY 17–26, 2025 (NSW)

Toyota Country Music Festival

Grab your guitars and head to Tamworth in northern NSW for the 53rd Toyota Country Music Festival. Troy Cassar-Daley, John Williamson, Max Jackson, James Johnston and Lee Kernaghan will join a line-up of performers during the 10-day festival, which is held across various venues in Australia's country music capital. Toyota Park — the festival's largest venue — will host a series of live and free concerts including the opening night, the Toyota Star Maker Grand Final, the Back to the Bush spectacular and the Toyota Best of the Buskers. The prestigious Toyota Golden Guitar Awards will be announced on January 25. tcmf.com.au

FEBRUARY 7–10, 2025 (TAS)

Wooden Boat Festival

The largest collection of wooden boats in the southern hemisphere will converge on Hobart's waterfront for a four-day celebration of every type of wooden vessel, from tall ships and other sailing boats to fishing boats, dinghies, model boats and even boats in bottles. Alongside the maritime marketplace at Princes Wharf No. 1, a fishing industry display and a shipwright's village, there will be stalls selling local food, as well as live entertainment and loads of demonstrations and displays of all things maritime. australianwoodenboatfestival.com.au

DECEMBER 27, 2024–JANUARY 1,2025 (QLD)

Woodford Folk Festival

Australia's largest gathering of musicians and artists sees more than 2000 local, national and international, artists, musicians and presenters put on hundreds of acts to an audience of more than 100,000 people. The festival begins each year with an iconic opening ceremony and closes with the spectacular Fire Event on New Year's Day. This year will be the 37th Woodford Folk Festival and the 30th held at Woodfordia in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. woodfordfolkfestival.com

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JANUARY 17–26, 2025 (SA)

Santos Tour Downunder

All eyes will once again be on the ochre jersey when Australia's premier cycling event, the Santos Tour Downunder, heralds the start of the Union Cycliste International (UCI) world cycling calendar. Watch male and female teams and riders from around the world climb, sprint and complete circuits on a route that takes them from the Barossa Valley and Willunga Hill, through world-famous wine country to the finish line on King William Road, Adelaide. tourdownunder.com.au

MARCH 29, 2025 (SA)

Seafood on Spencer

Taste freshly caught Spencer Gulf seafood prepared by some of South Australia's most talented chefs, with non-seafood and a wide range of dietary requirements also catered for, at the Seafood on Spencer event. Wander down Port Broughton's iconic jetty to view the boats, speak to the fishermen and learn about the rich history, sustainability and processes of fishing in the Spencer Gulf. There will also be live music, cooking demonstrations, a tasting barbecue and an array of South Australian beverages on offer. facebook.com/seafoodonspencer

JANUARY 8–12, 2025 (NSW)

Parkes Elvis Festival

The Parkes Elvis Festival is celebrating its 30th anniversary with a jam-packed program of rockin' 'n' rollin' fun. The King-sized program is, of course, filled with hundreds of Elvis-inspired events. Highlights include the Elvis gospel service, performances by tribute artists, busking, Elvis and Priscilla look-alike competitions, art and photography exhibitions and a street parade. parkeselvisfestival.com.au

MAY 4–5, 2025 (NSW)

Robertson Potato Festival

Here's one for the forward planners. Pick up those peelers, dust off your potato mashers and start saving those hessian sacks, the Robertson Potato Festival is on again in the NSW potato-farming heartland of the Southern Highlands. The weekend will include musical acts, gardening, food and cooking stages and competitions allowing visitors of all ages to compete in peeling, mash eating and sack-race events. The hotly contested Hessians on the Field is back and to accompany the human fashion fest, Hessian Pets on the Field has been added so competitors can showcase outfits for their furry friends. potatofestival.com.au

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THESE PAGES: Mum and dad Sarah and Ben watch on as little ones Henry and Frankie feed pet lambs Spot and Sandy.

bush oasis

SARAH AND BEN DUNSDON ARE RAISING THEIR YOUNG FAMILY ON A SHEEP AND CATTLE STATION NEAR CUNNAMULLA IN SOUTH-WESTERN QUEENSLAND.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEN BRASS

THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from top) Chickens roam free in front of the home's entrance; the kitchen features a classic palette of white and timber; Sarah has devoted her efforts to establishing the garden on the property.

Frankie Dunsdon jumps out of the car and immediately starts gathering a bunch of wildflowers from beside the road. She may only be five years old, but Frankie displays wisdom way beyond her years as she identifies the paper daisies and foxtails in the bunch.

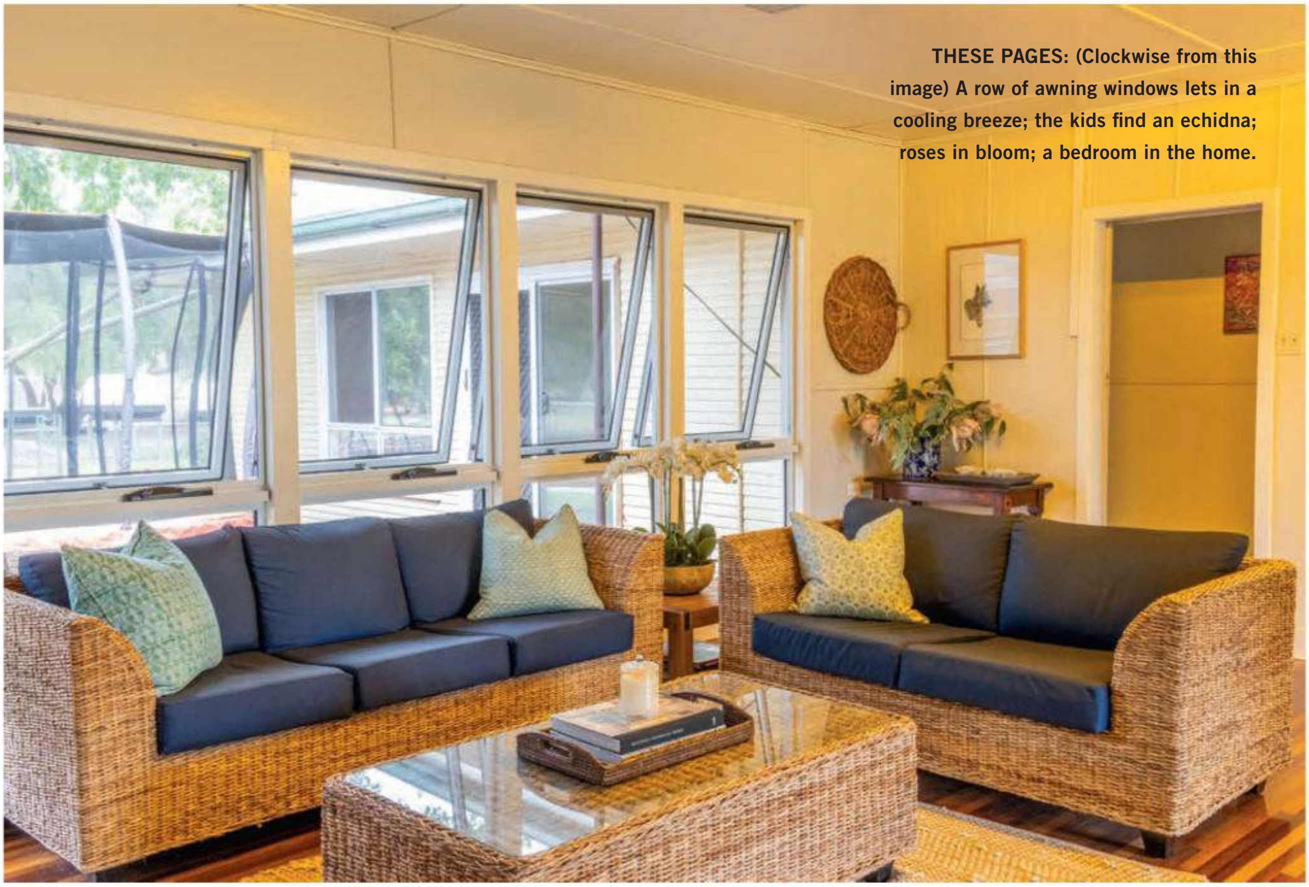
The endearing moment illustrates all that is remarkable about Frankie's world. Growing up on Francvillers, a sheep and cattle station just south of the outback Queensland town of Cunnamulla, Frankie and her little brother, Henry, aged three, have 50,000 acres (20,234 hectares) to call their backyard. They are completely immersed in station life, with chickens and poddy lambs Spot and Sandy to feed and dog Belle and cat Smoky to care for. Even at their tender ages, they have a deep appreciation for life on the land, and the plants and animals that sustain them, not to mention the rest of the nation.

Frankie and Henry's parents, Ben and Sarah, moved to Francvillers, shortly before Frankie was born in 2019. They run the station in partnership with Ben's parents, Don and Deb Dunsdon, who bought the property early in their married lives in 1976. Don grew up on Nulla station to the north of Cunnamulla and he and his brothers followed in their father's footsteps, developing a number of properties in the district, primarily growing Merino sheep for wool.

These days, the Dunsdons run mainly Angus cattle and their sheep are Dorpers — Don was an early adopter of the South African breed after the wool market crash of the early 1990s. Don and Deb live in a cottage on Francvillers, while Ben and Sarah and the children live in a nearby homestead, which was built in the 1950s.

Sarah grew up on a property growing cotton, fodder crops and table grapes at Surat, went to boarding school

THESE PAGES: Ben and Sarah opened up the kitchen and dining space for easy family living.



THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from this image) A row of awning windows lets in a cooling breeze; the kids find an echidna; roses in bloom; a bedroom in the home.

> *“My mother always says that the further west you go, the friendlier the people are, and we’ve found that to be very true.*

in Brisbane and worked as a veterinary nurse until she met Ben, who had also done his secondary education in Brisbane and was doing a diesel fitter’s apprenticeship. After school, Ben worked FIFO near Innamincka in remote north-eastern South Australia for a year, then completed his diesel fitter’s training before moving back to the Cunnamulla district. Sarah followed in 2012 and worked in the local medical centre for a while, then took time out to help Ben on the station where they were living.

“I got a bit tired of the 120-kilometre daily round trip to town,” she says. “I helped with mustering and lick [feed supplement] runs and really enjoyed the work.”

Sarah adds that they have settled easily into the community and have been joined by lots of people of a similar age and stage, who have spent time in the city and returned to the bush to work on the land and raise their young families. “At one stage, the Paroo shire had the highest birthrate in Australia,” she says. “There would be at least 50 children in our friendship group, so the kids will grow up with lots of friends. My mother always says the further west you go, the friendlier the people are, and we’ve found that to be very true. People think nothing of travelling hundreds of kilometres for a barbecue and go to a lot of effort for social events and community fundraisers. We’re lucky that we live close to town, so Frankie and Henry will go to primary school there.”

Inside the homestead, Sarah and Ben have rearranged some of the spaces to make it more conducive to raising a young family and contemporary living, opening up the kitchen and dining area and turning what in the past was probably staff accommodation into guest rooms. They’ve added a spacious undercover entertaining area and installed a pool, which is a godsend in summer when temperatures in the high 30s to low 40s are common.

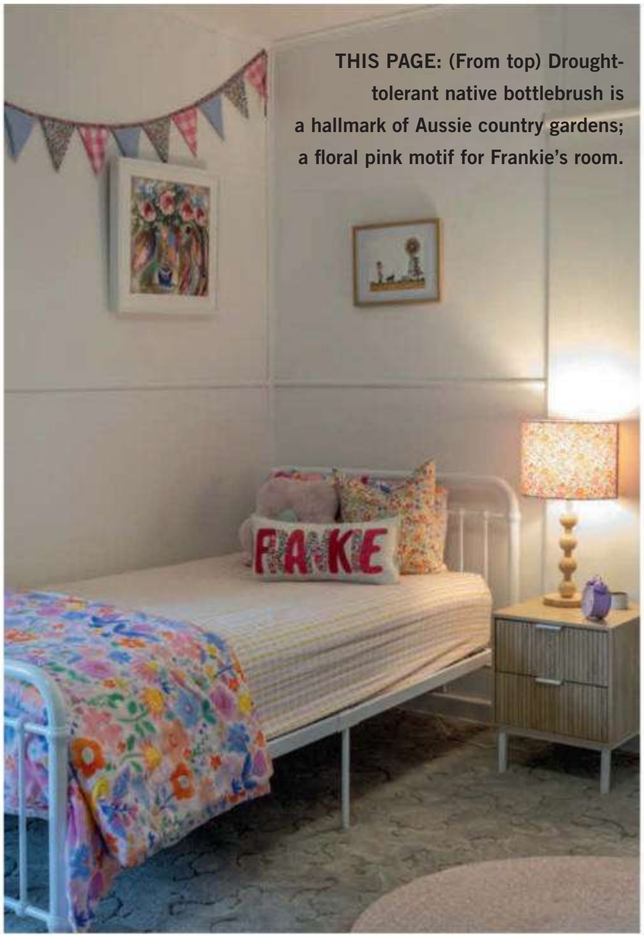
Sarah, who inherited a green thumb from her mother, has devoted considerable time to the garden, which was established by Deb. It’s always a challenge in a climate of extreme temperature range and the ever-present threat of drought. When *Australian Country* visited, the country was emerging from a fairly benign winter, and the roses were in full bloom, as well as oleanders underplanted with society garlic, callistemon, masses of mauve pigface and magenta bougainvillaea.

Sarah also shares some of her plant knowledge through a business called Outback Flora, which sells plants and helps people with garden design and maintenance. She's also in the process of adding cut flowers to her offering and is trialling various cottage garden plants in raised beds beside the house.

Ben is similarly in perpetual motion, juggling station work with his role as a helicopter pilot, mustering livestock on stations throughout the region. In their "spare" time, Ben and Sarah have established four camping grounds on the property, which are becoming increasingly popular with self-sufficient campers. Three of the sites are located on waterholes, while the fourth is perched on a ridgetop, perfect for capturing sweeping views of the often spectacular sunsets. The Dunsdons have installed outdoor bathtubs complete with "donkey" wood-fired hot water systems, so their guests can delight in a good soak while enjoying the night-time spectacle of the Milky Way.

The beauty of these bush camps is that each set of visitors has the entire site to themselves, so they can enjoy birdwatching, fishing, yabbying and the baths in truly splendid isolation. "We realise we are very lucky to live in this part of the world," Sarah says. "It was an obvious decision to share it." Meanwhile, guests who are lucky enough to have Frankie as part of the meet-and-greet team might end up with a personally curated posy. All botanically identified, of course. **AC**

For more information on bush camping at Francvillers, visit outbackescape.com.



THIS PAGE: (From top) Drought-tolerant native bottlebrush is a hallmark of Aussie country gardens; a floral pink motif for Frankie's room.

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THESE PAGES: (From opposite) Chae and husband Yoora at their home deep in Victoria's Dandenong Ranges; Chae's homemade condiments include soy sauce, doenjang and a variety of vinegars, which she serves in her restaurant and sells exclusively to diners.

table for six

AWARD-WINNING CHEF JUNG EUN CHAE SPECIALISES IN TRADITIONAL KOREAN SLOW FOOD, SO A MOVE FROM MELBOURNE'S BUSTLING BRUNSWICK TO THE TRANQUIL DANDENONG RANGES SEEMED THE NATURAL FIT.

BY ANASTASIA CASEY, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KIM SELBY

THESE PAGES: For Chae, "The calm, natural setting of the Dandenong Ranges fits perfectly with my cooking philosophy. It gives guests a chance not only to enjoy the food, but also to relax and unwind away from the rush of everyday life."

Who would've thought a tiny one-bedroom apartment in suburban Brunswick would become the setting for one of the trendiest venues on the Melbourne foodie scene? Certainly not its owner and chef Jung Eun Chae when she first started inviting the public into her own home five years ago. "I absolutely did not expect this," Chae says of the success of her two-hatted namesake restaurant.

Born and raised as an only child in Seoul, South Korea, growing up, Chae remembers her mother making huge batches of kimchi to share with family. Her father would package 20 kilograms worth and mail it to his side. Chae's mother would make soy sauce, soybean paste and sesame oil from home-grown sesame seeds. But it wasn't out of a love of cooking, it was out of necessity, and Chae started helping her mum when she saw how tired she was.

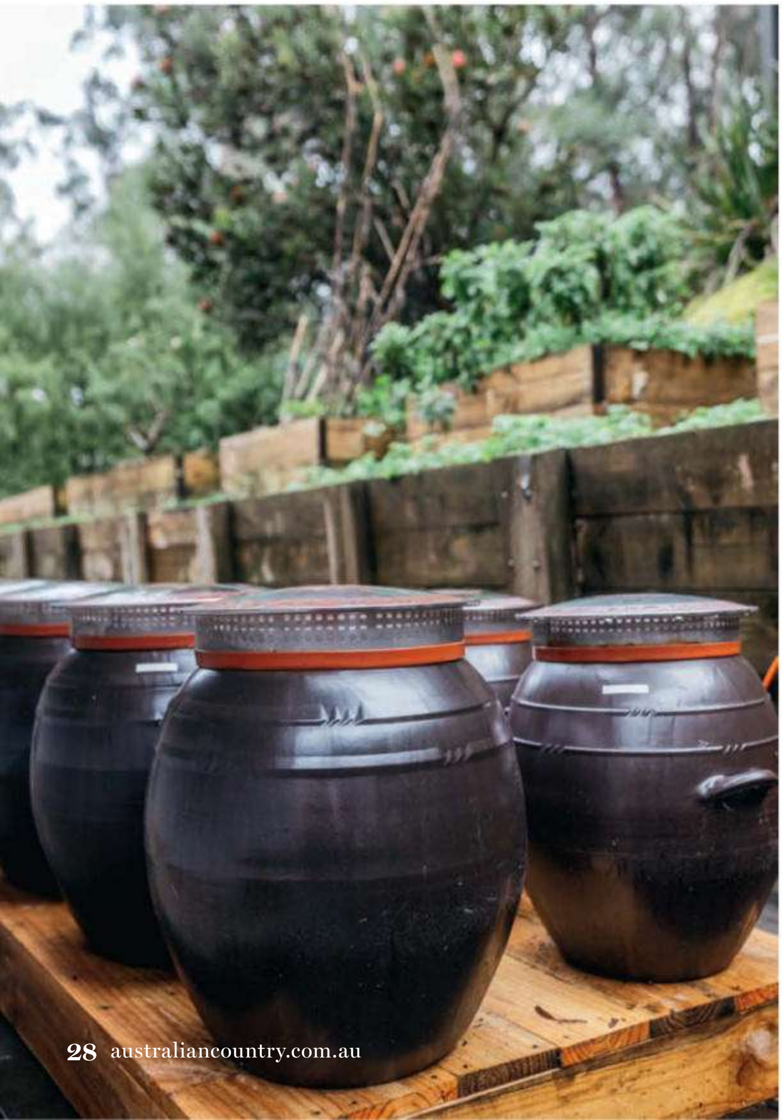
But she didn't see cooking in her future and in fact had once envisioned a very different life for herself. Once an aspiring animator, Chae majored in industrial design at university, but soon realised she "didn't have much passion for it". It wasn't until 2006, at the age of 20, when she migrated to Australia without speaking a word of English, that she turned to cooking.

"My career began with a junior position at a restaurant in the [Melbourne] CBD while I was completing my cookery studies at William Angliss," Chae explains. "Since then, I've worked my way up the career ladder in various restaurants in Melbourne." But the idea of an intimate one-table restaurant has lingered in the back of her mind since watching a documentary as a young girl about an elderly Korean woman serving food from her home.

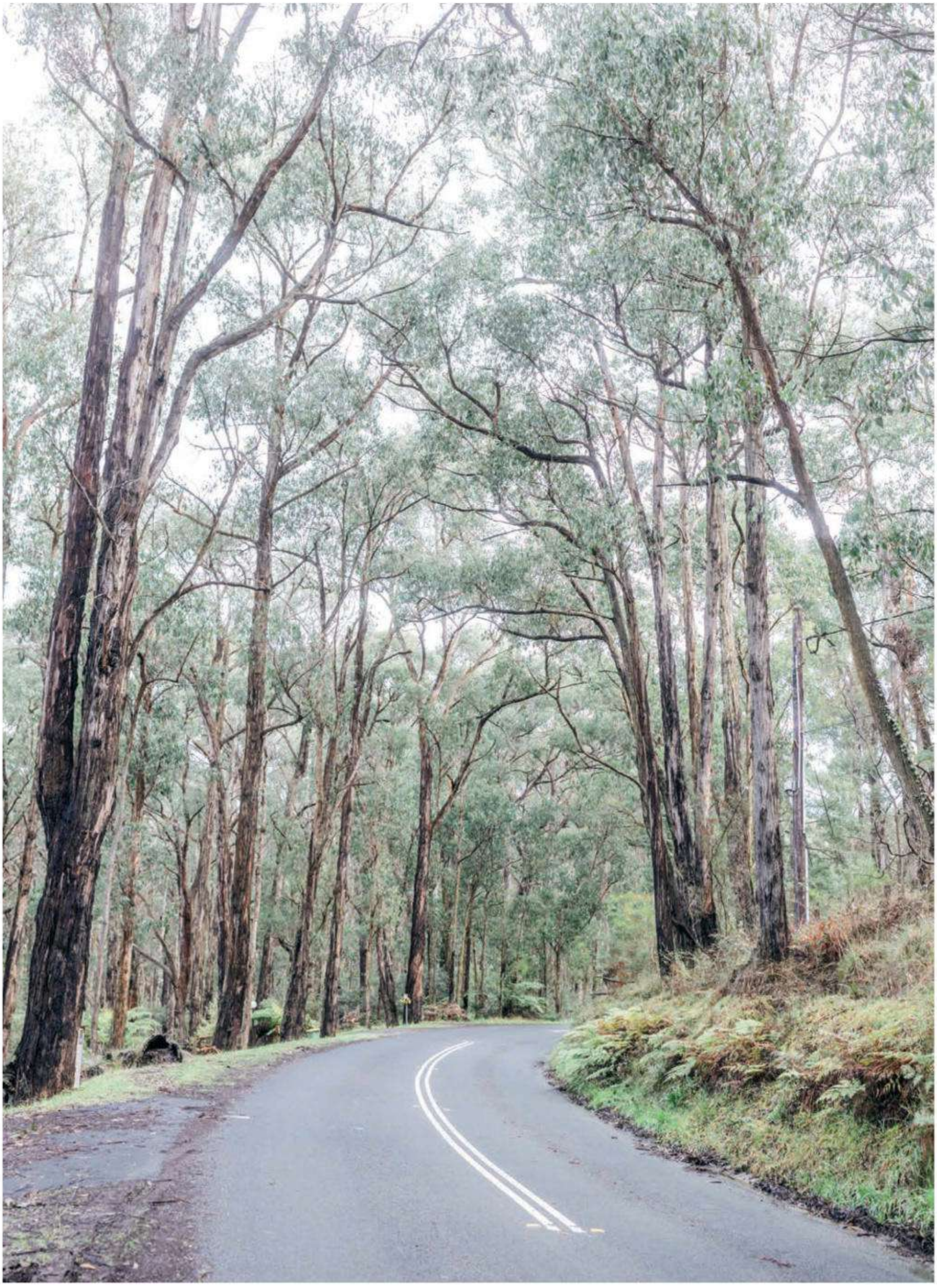
"I had to take a break after injuring my ankle in a minor car accident," Chae says. "I wasn't sure if I'd be able to return to a typical kitchen job, given the long hours of standing and physical labour. That's when the idea of a one-table diner resurfaced, and I decided to give it a try."

And so, in 2019, after a visit to her mum in Korea, where making kimchi was no longer a chore but a beloved activity shared with family, Chae opened her home to diners. The six-seat restaurant serves authentic Korean cuisine with a focus on traditional fermentation techniques and homemade condiments. And with a waitlist at one point of 10,000, including guests such as Hollywood comedian and actor Ali Wong, a taste of authentic Korean slow food quickly, however ironic, proved to be worth the long wait.

The emphasis is on slow as the entire fermentation process can take more than a year. For example, Chae explains, if you were making doenjang, a traditional Korean fermented soybean paste, you'd need to soak and steam the soybeans; mash them, shape them into blocks and leave them to ferment for several months; brine the fermented soybeans; then remove them from the brine



THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from above) Looking out over the treetops; a winding road takes you to CHAE's doorstep, a stark contrast from the busy streets of Melbourne; food prep; the couple import oongi from Korea, which are traditional earthenware pots used for fermenting and storing condiments.



> *“Making traditional Korean condiments in a restaurant was unheard of in Australia.*

and leave them to age for at least a year to enhance flavour and complexity. It’s no surprise then that “making traditional Korean condiments in a commercial restaurant was previously unheard of in Australia and even very rare in Korea,” Chae says.

She runs the restaurant with her husband, Yoora, whom she met 10 years ago through a mutual friend. “I focus on the cooking, he takes care of everything else involved in running the business,” she says. The menu at CHAE is changed every two months, with a focus on seasonal produce. Chae sources her ingredients from local farmers and producers, with whom she’s formed friendships along the way. She also visits the market each week before service to hand-pick fresh ingredients.

In 2022, Chae and Yoora moved operations to semi-rural Cockatoo in Victoria’s Dandenong Ranges, approximately 48 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. The couple live in the three-bedroom home with their baby black Labrador, Haru. The move has allowed them to produce and store much larger quantities of condiments, and they now import traditional clay jars called oongi from Korea, which they use to store ferments in their garden.

But aside from being able to expand their operations in making and storing Korean jang (fermented condiments), the restaurant’s small-dining concept remains the same. And Chae believes the tranquil and peaceful hillside surrounds has elevated the dining experience. “We designed the space to make our guests feel like they’re visiting a friend’s home, while also immersing them in the heart of the action, surrounded by the craft of condiment-making in progress,” Chae explains. “It’s a unique blend of warmth and craftsmanship. Our six seats are set along an L-shaped dining table, with the chef’s table positioned at the centre, allowing guests to engage with me as I prepare the menu. Though it’s larger than our Brunswick apartment, the space remains intimate enough for me to provide personal attention to each guest.”

The restaurant is only open on weekends, with a lunch and dinner sitting on Saturday, and lunch on Sunday. Guests fortunate enough to win a seat at the table are treated to a degustation menu featuring dishes such as braised beef, oyster, dongchimi and garlic chive; a palate cleanser of homemade vinegar; and Chae’s favourite on the current menu, pine nut porridge, which, according to the chef, is “rich in texture, nutty in flavour and paired with subtle seasoning”.

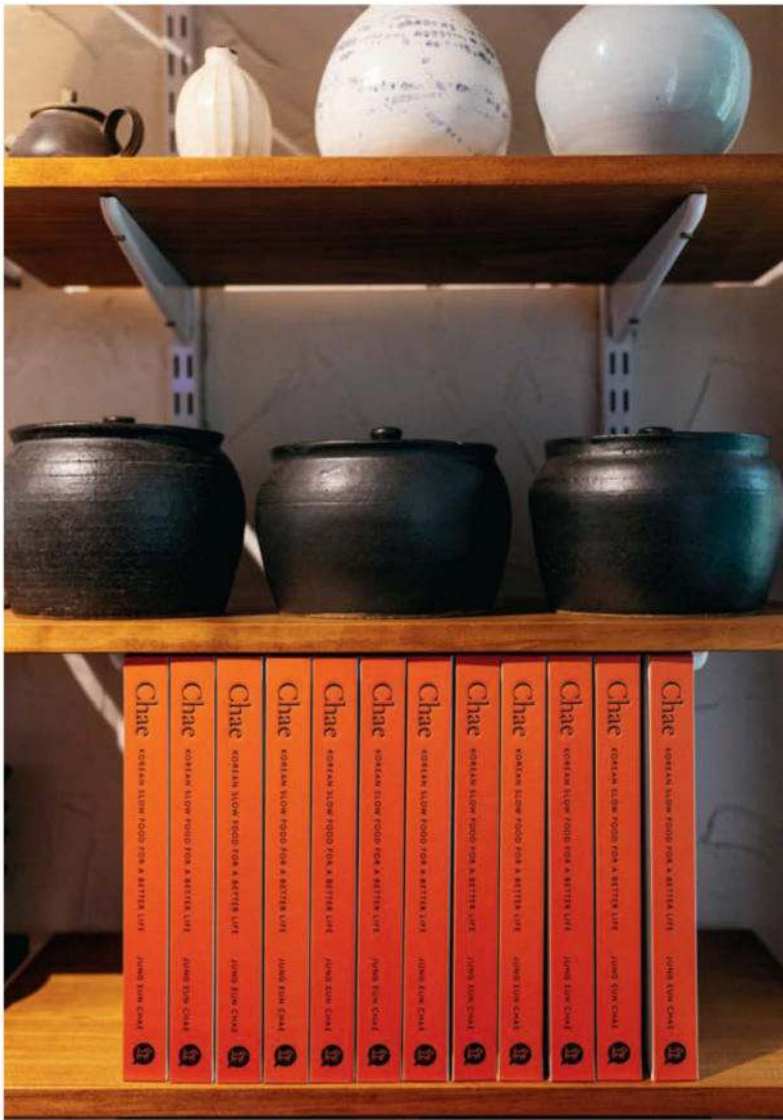
While Chae doesn’t have any plans to expand the restaurant, she’s able to share her traditional Korean slow food with a wider audience through her recently published cookbook, *Chae: Korean Slow Food for a Better Life*.

The book consists of two main chapters, with the first exploring traditional Korean condiments, and the rest divided into four sub-chapters, each featuring seasonal recipes that utilise the condiments. “These seasonal recipes are a blend of what I serve at my restaurant and dishes that I grew up enjoying,” Chae says.

The chef hopes her book “serves as a guide to the rich culinary heritage of Korea and gives readers the opportunity to incorporate Korean flavours into their everyday dining.” And *Australian Country* readers are fortunate enough to experience just that with a sampling of some of Chae’s recipes on the following pages. **AC**

THESE PAGES: Chae continues the family tradition of making kimchi, which she says "serves as the backbone of almost every Korean dining table", and which she, of course, features in her recently published cookbook.

Chae
KOREAN SLOW FOOD FOR A BETTER LIFE
JUNG EUN CHAE


Chae
KOREAN SLOW FOOD FOR A BETTER LIFE
JUNG EUN CHAE

the taste of korea

JUNG EUN CHAE SHARES SECRETS FROM THE KOREAN KITCHEN FROM HER HOME IN VICTORIA'S DANDENONG RANGES.

STEAMED CHICKEN WITH CRISPY RICE CRUST

NURUNGJI DAK-SAMGYE-TANG

SERVES 2

Korean dishes believed to have nourishing properties are known as boyangsik. They're prepared with ingredients considered to have health-promoting benefits, such as certain grains, vegetables and medicinal herbs, and are most often enjoyed when you need to replenish your energy or strengthen your body, such as after an illness or during the cold winter months. Samgyetang, or chicken soup, is a typical example of boyangsik. This hearty and nutritious meal provides a balance of essential nutrients to support overall wellbeing.

1 × 1.35–1.45kg whole chicken, trimmed of excess fat
250g (1 cup) glutinous rice
120g (1 cup) chopped spring onion
KOREAN MEDICINAL HERBS
1 packet of Samgyetang soup base (available at Korean grocers)
60g garlic cloves, peeled
Salt and pepper, to taste

Stuff the cavity with the soup base contents and half the garlic cloves, then close the opening with toothpicks. Rinse the glutinous rice twice, then spread it in the base of a pressure cooker and place the prepared chicken on top.

Scatter the remaining garlic cloves around the chicken, then add just enough water to submerge the chicken. Boil on high until the pressure cooker starts to whistle, then leave it on high heat for another 2 minutes before reducing to medium and cooking for another 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and leave it to sit and simmer in the residual heat for 10 minutes before opening.

Open the pressure cooker and transfer the chicken to a bowl. Remove the liquid, add half to the bowl with the chicken and reserve the other half to cook the rice. Before serving, season the meat and soup to taste with salt and pepper. In traditional fashion, the chicken is presented whole, allowing individuals to personally shred the meat from the bones.

Turn the cooker to low heat and leave the rice for 15 minutes to scorch on the bottom. Once the bottom of the rice turns golden, pour the reserved soup back into the pressure cooker and boil the porridge for 20 minutes, or until thickened to a porridge-like texture. Season to taste with salt and serve with the spring onion.

KIMCHI PANCAKES

KIMCHI-JEON

SERVES 4

I am not sure why, but most Koreans have jeon (pancakes) with makgeolli (cloudy rice wine) on rainy days. My mum is also fond of making jeon, especially when coming to the end of a batch of kimchi, because the sourness of well-aged kimchi works so well with pancakes.

There's also a tradition of jeon and makgeolli on the way to mountaintops. When I was a child, we would sometimes go to the mountains near my mum's place. On the road, there's a huge place for pancakes and rice wine. Wherever you have it, the combination of kimchi-jeon made with tangy kimchi and a bowl of icy cold makgeolli is an extraordinary flavour parade that you must try!

In 2019, Yoora and I visited the famous Gwangjang Market in Seoul, said to be the oldest market in Korea and very well known for its street food. All of a sudden, it rained. We were enveloped by the sound of heavy rain and the white noise of shop owners and customers chatting. The smell of wet asphalt and the sounds of the market made us crave pancakes and makgeolli. We can't explain it, but it was very powerful.

Almost without thinking, we made our way to a stall and ordered a bowl of makgeolli and kimchi-jeon. When you tear the golden, freshly fried kimchi pancake apart with chopsticks, the fragrant steam that breaks through from between the layers is phenomenal. We poured

the milky makgeolli into a battered brass bowl and gulped it down immediately. The bubbles tickled our throats as they made their way down. It was exhilarating, especially as the alcohol quickly and pleasantly warmed our bodies. Maybe we don't need to explain how essential this combination is: we just need to urge you to try it.

250g (1 cup) Cabbage kimchi, aged for 1–2 months and chopped, plus some kimchi juice
100g Korean-pancake mix (available from Asian grocers)
100g Korean frying mix (available from Asian grocers)
150g mixed seafood
1 tablespoon gochugaru (Korean red chilli powder)
Vegetable oil, for shallow-frying
1 red chilli, destemmed and sliced diagonally
DIPPING SAUCE
2 tablespoons all-purpose soy sauce (recipe on p.35)
2 tablespoons traditional persimmon vinegar (recipe p.35), or apple cider vinegar
¼ tablespoon sesame oil

In a bowl, combine the chopped

kimchi, Korean pancake and frying mixes, the seafood, gochugaru and add some salt. Slowly add just enough kimchi juice to make a smooth batter that easily runs off a spoon. If you don't have enough kimchi juice, top up with a little water. (If the batter is too thick, the jeon will become hard.)

Make the dipping sauce by combining all the ingredients in a bowl. Heat a frying pan over a medium heat and add enough oil for shallow-frying. Using a ladle, spoon a thin layer of batter into the pan. (You should have enough batter for two large pancakes.) If the batter consistency is right, it should spread out evenly and easily in the pan. Kimchi-jeon is most delicious when you use a generous amount of oil for frying.

Cook for 4–5 minutes. When the outer edge becomes crisp and golden, flip the pancake over and cook the other side until crispy. Press down gently with your spatula to ensure the pancake crisps well all over.

Once the kimchi-jeon is crisp and evenly golden, remove it from the pan and keep warm while you cook the other pancakes. Repeat with the remaining batter, then serve the kimchi-jeon with a couple of pieces of sliced chilli in the centre and the dipping sauce on the side.

TIP It is essential to control the heat when making jeon, and cooking over a medium–high heat will provide the best results. If the heat is too low, the batter will become runny, and it will burn if the heat is too high.

FRIED EGGPLANT
GAJI TWIGIM

SERVES 3

Eggplant is plentiful at the end of summer as it turns to autumn, so we find lots of ways to eat it. Typically, it's steamed and mixed with soy, vinegar, chilli and garlic, but it's an acquired taste. In fact, Yoora doesn't like eggplant at all – except for this fried version. Maybe you'll also find that this is an eggplant dish that seduces eggplant haters. Battered, fried and served with a spicy dipping sauce, these eggplant pieces are crunchy on the outside and soft and juicy on the inside. I love to snack on them as soon as they're cooked.

1 eggplant, destemmed
Iced water, for the batter
2 litres (8 cups) vegetable oil, for deep-frying
DRY BATTER
150g (1 cup) plain flour
3 tablespoons cornflour
2 teaspoons garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon baking powder
DIPPING SAUCE
1 tablespoon all-purpose soy sauce (recipe on next page)
1 tablespoon traditional persimmon vinegar (recipe on next page), or apple cider vinegar
½ tablespoon gochugaru (Korean red chilli powder)

Cut the eggplant into bite-sized pieces. Place in a bowl and season with salt. Mix all the batter ingredients together in a large bowl, add the eggplant and toss to coat. Remove the dusted eggplant from the batter and set aside. To the remaining dry batter mix, add one-and-a-half times the quantity of iced water and mix well.

Heat the oil in a deep-fryer or large pot to 170–180°C. If you do not have a cooking thermometer, pick up some batter with chopsticks and drop it in the oil. If it sinks halfway down, then immediately rises to the top, the oil is ready.

Working in small batches, dip the dusted eggplant in the batter, turning to coat, then fry in the hot oil. Don't overcrowd the pot, as this will drop the oil temperature, causing your batter to become soggy. Once the eggplant rises to the surface, use chopsticks to flip it over until all sides are golden brown and crisp. Remove from the oil and place on a wire rack to cool. Mix all the ingredients together for the dipping sauce and serve it with the crispy eggplant fries.

BRAISED SNAPPER
DOMIJJIM

SERVES 4

I've taken a traditional Korean fish dumpling and made it my own, tied up with a chive stem to make an elegant package of stuffed fish, preferably snapper, which is beautiful in spring. It's light, balanced, looks very elegant and always gets a great response when we serve it at CHAE.

400–500g skin-on snapper fillet
½ tablespoon coarse sea salt
1 tablespoon makgeolli (cloudy rice wine)
100g mung bean sprouts, trimmed
4 chives
100g scotch fillet, thinly sliced
1 shiitake mushroom, sliced
SAUCE
125ml (½ cup) all-purpose soy sauce (recipe follows)
125ml (½ cup) traditional persimmon vinegar (recipe follows), or apple cider vinegar
dried red chilli seeds, to taste

Cut the snapper fillet into 4 equal pieces. Dip the snapper fillets in a mixture of makgeolli and salt, ensuring they are well coated. Cover and refrigerate to cure for about 3 hours.

Bring a saucepan of salted water to

the boil over a high heat and blanch the bean sprouts and chives for 30 seconds, then drain and rinse under cold running water. Squeeze out any excess water with your hands.

Score the thickest part of the snapper pieces and open up the slits. Cut through the snapper pieces then open them out like a book to butterfly. Stuff the cavity with the bean sprouts, sliced beef and shiitake, and sprinkle in some salt. Fold the snapper back over the stuffing, then tie each parcel up with a chive.

Part-fill a large saucepan with water and place a colander or bamboo steamer basket on top, making sure the water doesn't touch the base of the colander. Place the pan over a medium heat and, once the water is simmering, steam the fish for about 10 minutes or until it is just cooked. Meanwhile, make the sauce by mixing the soy sauce with the vinegar in a bowl. Place the fish on a plate and sprinkle the sauce over the fish. Finish with some dried red chilli seeds if you like a little added spice.

ALL-PURPOSE SOY SAUCE
MANNEUNG GANJANG

MAKES APPROX. 2 LITRES (8 CUPS)

As the name suggests, all-purpose soy sauce is the foundational seasoning used in a wide range of dishes in my kitchen. It's a perfect and versatile starting point for crafting seasonings tailored to your specific needs. The colour of this soy sauce deepens as it ages and, due to this darker hue and the complex flavours imparted by various ingredients, it is not ideally suited to seasoning soup dishes or broths.

10g dried anchovies
2 litres (8 cups) simplified Korean soup soy sauce
½ apple, quartered and deseeded
½ onion, peeled and halved
2g chilli flakes
25g fresh shiitake mushrooms
1 spring (green) onion
5 × 5cm piece of dried kelp
10g piece ginger, peeled
5 garlic cloves, peeled
125ml fermented fruit extract

Dry-fry the anchovies in a stockpot over a low heat for 2 minutes. Add all the remaining ingredients and bring to the boil over a high heat. Once boiling, reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 2 hours, then turn off the heat and allow to cool completely. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl or container, discarding the solids. Store in a sealed sterilised glass bottle (see tip) in the fridge for up to 2 years.

TIP To sterilise your bottle, first wash it out with hot soapy water, then dry thoroughly. Dampen a clean cloth with food-grade sanitiser and wipe out the bottle.

TRADITIONAL PERSIMMON VINEGAR
GAM SIKCHO

MAKES 5 LITRES

This is the simplest way to prepare this traditional vinegar. Place the persimmons in a glass jar and allow nature to run its course. Over time, the fruit breaks down, producing a juice that gradually transforms into vinegar. Thanks to its numerous health benefits and its unique blend of sour and sweet flavours, persimmon vinegar has become a staple condiment in dishes that require a touch of sourness. However, as with many other traditional Korean condiments, preparing persimmon vinegar can be a time-consuming process. It takes a minimum of 1 year for the persimmons to transform into vinegar, and the longer you age it the richer the flavour becomes. If you are short on time and space, store-bought persimmon vinegar can be used instead.

50 soft, ripe persimmons

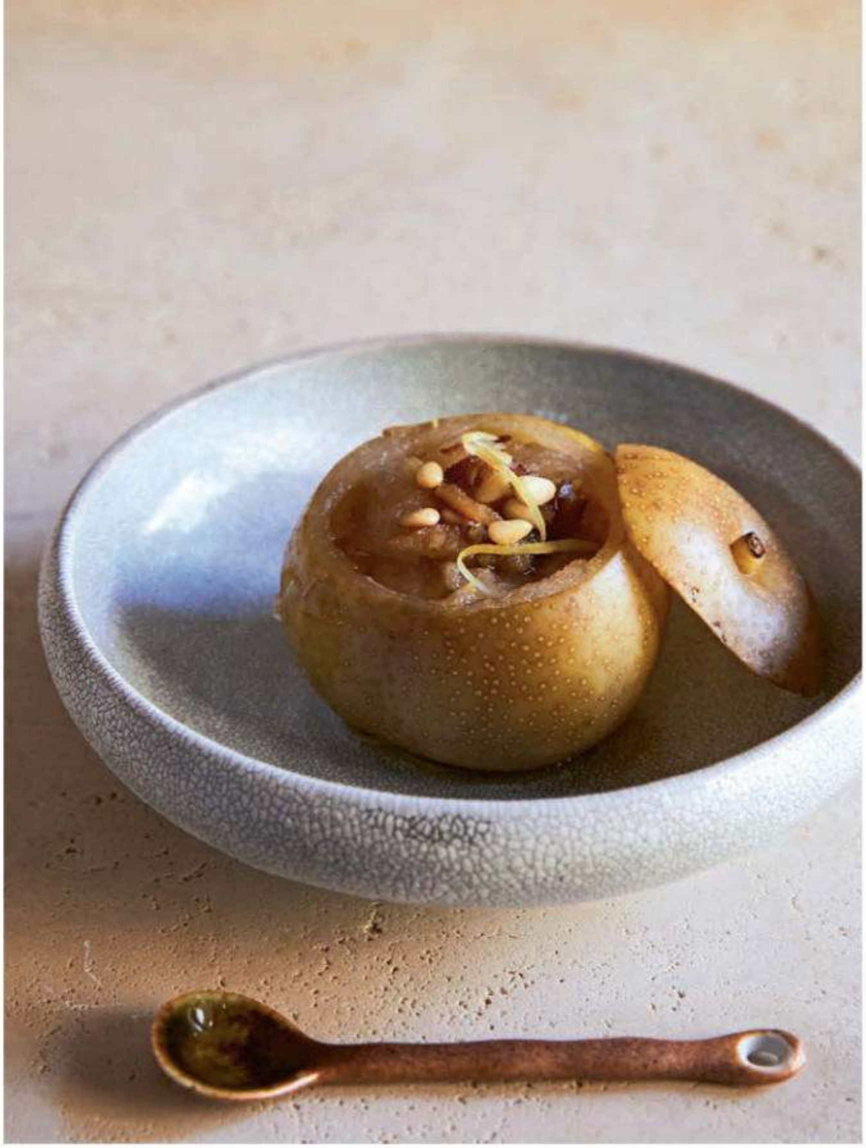
Start by sterilising a 12-litre glass jar, then dry completely. If any moisture remains in the jar, the vinegar will go off. Wash the persimmons and dry them completely. Remove any imperfections on the fruit's surface with a knife. You do not have to remove the stem.

Place the persimmons in the sterile jar and thoroughly seal the top with plastic wrap. Pierce the wrap twice on top with a needle or fine skewer, then cover the plastic wrap with a cotton cloth to prevent fruit flies from entering the jar.

Leave the persimmon jar in a cool, dry place for 5–6 months. From about day 15 onwards, the persimmon juice will begin to gather at the bottom of the jar and a white film will gather on top.

After 5–6 months, separate the juice from the fruit by straining through a fine-mesh sieve. Discard the fruit and transfer the juice to a clean, sterilised jar. Make it airtight by covering the mouth of the jar with a few layers of plastic wrap and securing it tightly with a rubber band. Leave to ferment for at least another 6 months.

After approximately 6 months, the fermented persimmon juice will naturally separate into two distinct layers. The upper layer will be clear, while the bottom will become cloudy due to sediment settling at the bottom. Carefully scoop out the clear upper part with a ladle and store in a sealed glass bottle in a cool dry place. The finished persimmon vinegar does not have an expiry date. (Discard the sediment from the bottom.)



STEAMED PEAR
BAESOOK

SERVES 5

This winter dessert is good for sore throats and colds thanks to its medicinal combination of pear, ginger and jujube.

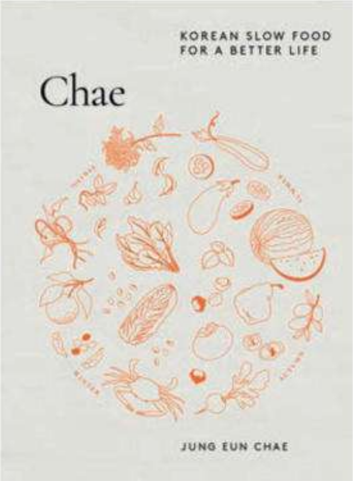
2 teaspoons bicarbonate of soda
5 nashi pears
1.5–2cm piece of ginger, sliced into thin strips
1 jujube, seeded and sliced thinly
peel of ½ lemon, julienned
2 tablespoons jocheong (rice syrup)
10g pine nuts

Rub the bicarbonate of soda on the skin of the pears to wash them. Cut 1cm off the top of each pear to use later as a lid. Use a small spoon to scoop out the pear flesh, leaving only about 5mm around the edge. Remove the seeds and place the flesh in a bowl with the ginger, jujube and julienned lemon peel.

Add 1 tablespoon of the jocheong and mix well, then fill the pear with the mixture. Carefully pour the remaining jocheong on top of the stuffing, scatter a few pine nuts on top and cover each pear with its lid.

Place the pear in a steamer, cover and steam over a medium heat for about 30 minutes. Or you can use the double-boiler method: set a colander over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the water doesn't touch the base of the colander. Add the pear, cover with a lid and steam over a medium heat for 30 minutes.

This dish is most delicious when served hot, but you can cool it down in the refrigerator and serve it later as a snack, too. **AC**



This is an edited extract from *Chae: Korean Slow Food for a Better Life* by Jung Eun Chae, published by Hardie Grant Books, RRP $60. In stores nationally. Photography by Armelle Habib.

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THESE PAGES: The interiors of Tricia and husband Daryl's home feature seaside tones of soft blues and whites, complementing its waterfront location beautifully.

a rural perspective

FROM HER HOME IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COASTAL TOWN OF WALLAROO, TRICIA STRINGER'S NOVELS EXPLORE CONTEMPORARY ISSUES USUALLY WITH A COUNTRY SETTING.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** ROSS WILLIAMS

TRICIA STRINGER
head for the hills
from the bestselling Australian author of Back on Track

THESE PAGES: Tricia writes from her home office in Wallaroo, which is located on the Yorke Peninsula's Copper Coast, with its beautiful white sandy beaches.

> *When I wasn't reading, I was busy pretending to be a librarian.*

As a child growing up on a farm on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, Tricia Stringer's twin passions were for reading and pretending to be a librarian. Her fascination with all things literary has manifested into adult life first with her career as a teacher-librarian and, more recently, as the author of an impressive line-up of rural romance, historic and contemporary relationship-focused novels.

"My mother was a huge influence, both as an avid reader and as a volunteer at our local library," Tricia recalls. "When I wasn't reading, I was busy pretending to be a librarian, arranging all our books in alphabetical order and checking books in and out."

Tricia went off to boarding school in Adelaide and then teacher's college. She worked in various country schools, met and married Daryl, who worked as a postmaster for Australia Post. In 1989, they moved east to Wallaroo on the Yorke Peninsula's Copper Coast where Tricia had been offered a permanent teaching role. For a time, they had the licence for the local post office and, true to form, Tricia set up a children's bookstore in the spacious building.

It was Tricia's dedication to her students that inadvertently kick-started her writing career when the Copper Coast community was hosting its biennial celebration of its Cornish heritage, the Kernewek Lowender Festival. The event celebrates the discovery of copper in the region in 1859 and, in the ensuing years, the towns of Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina boomed as copper miners from England migrated to work in the mines. By 1865, Cornish settlers made up more than 40 per cent of South Australia's immigrant population, and by 1875 Moonta had surpassed Cornwall as the British Empire's largest copper region. By 1890, the population of the region was approximately 30,000.

BESTSELLING AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR
TRICIA STRINGER
head for the hills
Tricia

> “*Older people are often relegated as secondary characters and I wanted to give them a voice.*

“As a teacher, I went looking for something to bring this story to life for my year four and five students,” Tricia recalls. “When I discovered there was nothing age appropriate, I hit on the idea of writing a book about it for them. I quickly learnt that it wasn’t that easy, but I did go on to write a few local stories that are still in school libraries in this area.”

With some writing courses under her belt, Tricia was emboldened to enter a competition for stories with a rural theme. “That was in the early 2000s and rural romance wasn’t even a genre,” she recalls. “But I ended up self-publishing three novels.”

The turning point came in 2012, when Harlequin Australia was looking for rural fiction and Tricia submitted her fourth manuscript. *Queen of the Road* won the Romance Writers of Australia’s book of the year in 2013, and she followed up with seven rural romances and a three-part historical saga set in the Flinders Ranges. She resigned from her “day” job in the classroom in 2014 and has since focused entirely on her writing.

In recent years, Tricia has pivoted to writing family-focused novels, often rural-based, but dealing with contemporary issues. “I decided I’d like to write about people who are closer to my own age,” she says. “Older people are often relegated as secondary characters and I wanted to give them a voice.” With a well-honed work ethic, she manages to produce a new work every year. Tricia’s most recent offering, *Head for the Hills*, a story of a small Adelaide Hills town divided over property development with a detour into the plight of women at risk of homelessness, is her 17th novel.

“When I was still teaching, I’d grab any squirrel of time for writing, which meant that I often worked in the early mornings and late at night,” she says. “But, these days, I’m more regular with my hours. I imagine I’m going to work in an office and go into my study first thing in the morning. That’s my best time as I wake up with ideas and need to get them down.”

Tricia aims to commit 2000 words to the keyboard most mornings, some days with more success than others. That leaves the afternoons free for life admin — she manages her own social media, writes a quarterly newsletter to her inner circle of readers and deals with the usual minutiae of running a small business. In between, she’s a note maker, journalling any thoughts about her current book or the next one — “I’ve always got stories fermenting away in my head”.

“I’m not a huge plotter,” she explains. “When I start writing, I have a rough idea of the beginning and where it’s going to end up, but what’s in between is a surprise. With *Head for the Hills*, one of my lead characters turned up in the waiting room of a doctor’s surgery. I had no idea at that point that she was going to become so important to the storyline.”

On the odd occasion that she does get stuck, Tricia says she knows to get up and go for a walk, or a paddle in the ocean that her new home on Wallaroo’s waterfront overlooks. “We have a pontoon, but we don’t have a boat,” she says. “However, we do have kayaks. Daryl is an ocean kayaker as he likes to fish, but I stay closer in. I also enjoy the garden, though Daryl is the main gardener in our partnership.”

Time with family and grandchildren is another important distraction. With a son and daughter-in-law working in the Adelaide Hills wine industry, wine is another abiding interest, and Tricia recently embarked on a challenge to match each of her books with an appropriate drop. *Head for the Hills* is paired with a Gamay, from the Adelaide Hills, naturally.

While she says she enjoys every aspect of the writing process, inevitably there comes a time when she despairs that “nobody will want to read it”. “I was heartened to learn that even [bestselling American horror writer] Stephen King admits to that phase,”

THESE PAGES: There’s much to do in Wallaroo, and both Tricia and Daryl enjoy kayaking in the waters that their home overlooks and, of course, settling indoors with some vino and a platter of cheese and cured meats.

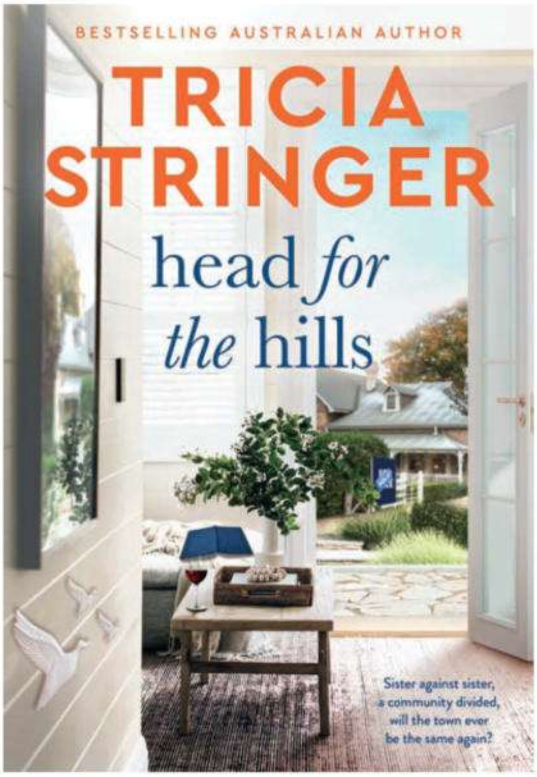
OCKY

HE LANE VINEYARD

Tricia says. "It's part of the discipline to just keep writing, and it will sort itself out."

It also helps that she's been working with the same editor for the past 10 books. "I genuinely enjoy the editing process," Tricia says. "I can talk with my family about whatever I'm engrossed in, but eventually their eyes glaze over. It's great to have an editor you know and trust to make suggestions that inevitably make the story stronger."

When *Australian Country* caught up with Tricia, she was about to embark on promotional tours for *Head for the Hills*, which would take her back to her old home country on the Eyre Peninsula up to Queensland and possibly home via the Victorian city of Bendigo. "I do love meeting my readers," she says. "Their feedback is always appreciated and the travel involved always opens the possibility of a setting for another book." **AC**


BESTSELLING AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR
TRICIA STRINGER
head for the hills
Sister against sister, a community divided, will the town ever be the same again?

THIS PAGE: **(From top) Tricia serves up some pastries from her kitchen; the writer's latest offering, *Head for the Hills*, was published in October 2024.**

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HONOURING THEIR MOTHER'S ENGLISH TRADITIONS, A NSW FAMILY HAS ESTABLISHED A CHRISTMAS TREE FARM SELLING AUTHENTIC, VIBRANT PINE TREES AT THE SAME TIME AS RAISING FUNDS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEN BRASS

THESE PAGES: The Sizers have planted 27,000 trees on their farm, which will enable them to harvest 4000 trees each year.

“There’s no textbook for growing Christmas trees.

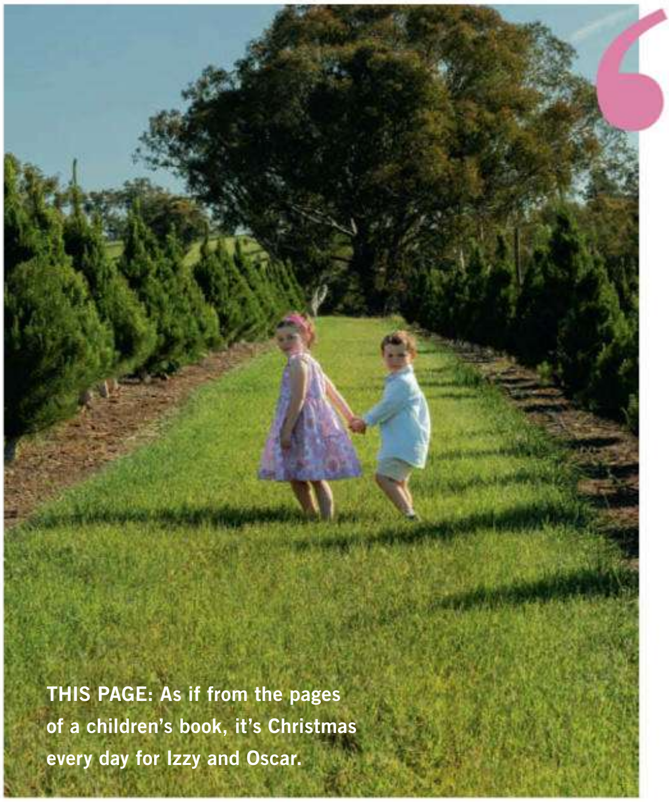
THESE PAGES: Kim, Rob and their young ones Izzy and Oscar are enjoying life on their farm in the NSW New England region.

If it weren’t for Christine Duver’s unwavering commitment to having a “real” Christmas tree, her daughter, Kim, and son-in-law, Rob Sizer, might never have established Hillview Christmas Tree farm at Dungowan, near Tamworth in the NSW New England region.

As Christine’s husband, Wayne, tells the story, he and Christine returned to Australia after 20 years living and working on her family farm in her home county of Norfolk. They bought a farm at Coffs Harbour on the NSW Mid North Coast. “Having never had a fake Christmas tree in her life, Christine wasn’t about to start just because we’d moved to Australia,” Wayne recalls.

When she came home with what could only be described as an overpriced twig, Wayne saw a gap in the market and, shortly after, they planted the first pine trees in what would become North Coast Christmas Tree farm. Their first planting of 1000 trees was quickly supplemented by more and with judicious care and pruning, Christine, who retrained as an agriculture teacher, finally had a decent “real” tree to mark the festive seasons.

Meanwhile, Kim, who’d gone to school and then uni in Armidale, where she studied agronomy, moved to Gunnedah for work, and met and married Rob, who’d grown up in Deniliquin in the Riverina, and was working as a farm business analyst. In his “spare” time, Rob started a metalwork business, Custom Cutting Studio, in their garage, making laser-cut personalised farm and house signs, sculptures, firepits and garden art. His side



THIS PAGE: As if from the pages of a children's book, it's Christmas every day for Izzy and Oscar.

> *We want to keep our business local, so we might as well benefit local organisations.*

hustle quickly outgrew his day job, and with daughter Izzy, now five, a toddler, and Oscar, now three, a baby, Rob and Kim went looking for land with space for a bigger shed. They found what they were looking for in a 360-acre (145-hectare) block at Dungowan, with 100 acres (40ha) of river flat beside the Peel River for growing hay.

Sadly, Christine passed away from cancer at the same time, and Wayne also decided to sell the farm and retire to the Tamworth district. With good soil and plenty of water, it was an obvious decision to honour Christine's legacy and, soon after arriving, Rob and Kim planted Hillview's first pine forest.

"There's no textbook for growing Christmas trees," Kim says. "However, we're in the fortunate position of having the benefit of Dad's experience, alongside our own expertise. We knew from the outset that we wanted to go big and we now have 27,000 trees planted to enable us to harvest 4000 trees a year."

When *Australian Country* visited the Sizers, they were preparing for their first cutting season. The immaculately maintained hillsides of their property were lined with countless rows of pines, all drip-fed with water from the river and carefully nurtured to deliver the bushiest possible traditional form.

"The trick is to prune the trees every three to four months," Rob says. "That encourages lateral growth and ensures they don't get too tall and spindly."

"At the same time, we want to let it be a tree," Kim adds. "It's part of nature to have some irregularities and we encourage people not to overdecorate, so the tree's inherent beauty shines through."

The Sizers' plan is to market locally to the towns of Tamworth, Gunnedah, Quirindi and Uralla, and they've also made an arrangement with a local Coffs Harbour agent to supply Wayne's former customers. "We're establishing partnerships with local school P&Cs, youth groups and not-for-profits," Rob explains. "The price will include a fundraising component of $20 per tree for each charity."

"It was a pretty obvious choice," Kim adds. "We could hire staff to handle the sales, or we could work with fundraisers. It's just a scaled-up version of the old choccy boxes or biscuit sales, with less money handling. The clients order via our website, the charities provide the volunteers to check names off lists and supervise the distribution from a carpark or other accessible spot. At the end, we make one deposit of all the funds into the charity's account. We want to keep our business local, so we might as well benefit local organisations."

Hillview trees come in three sizes — small (1.5m-1.8m), medium (1.8m–2.1m) and large (2.1m-2.4m). Rob points out the average home ceiling is 2.4m, so customers would be advised to check that the tree will fit before they order. With quality their utmost priority, they're aiming to harvest and net their trees on the day of sale, ensuring the tree will last until the all-important day.

"Our trees will be good for three to four weeks," Kim says. "But if you look after them properly, they could stay fresh for longer. You need to treat them like cut flowers. Keep the water up to them as a tree can consume up to a litre a day, and retrim the stump so it can keep wicking water."

Meanwhile, Izzy and Oscar are thriving on country life, attending a local preschool run by the CWA and enjoying space to run free and play on the farm. They enjoy running between the pine rows and already are experienced hands at decorating a tree. "They're a bit young just yet to understand that having a tree is a once-a-year event for most families," Kim says. "For now, it's Christmas every day." **AC**

For more information, visit hillviewchristmastrees.com.au.

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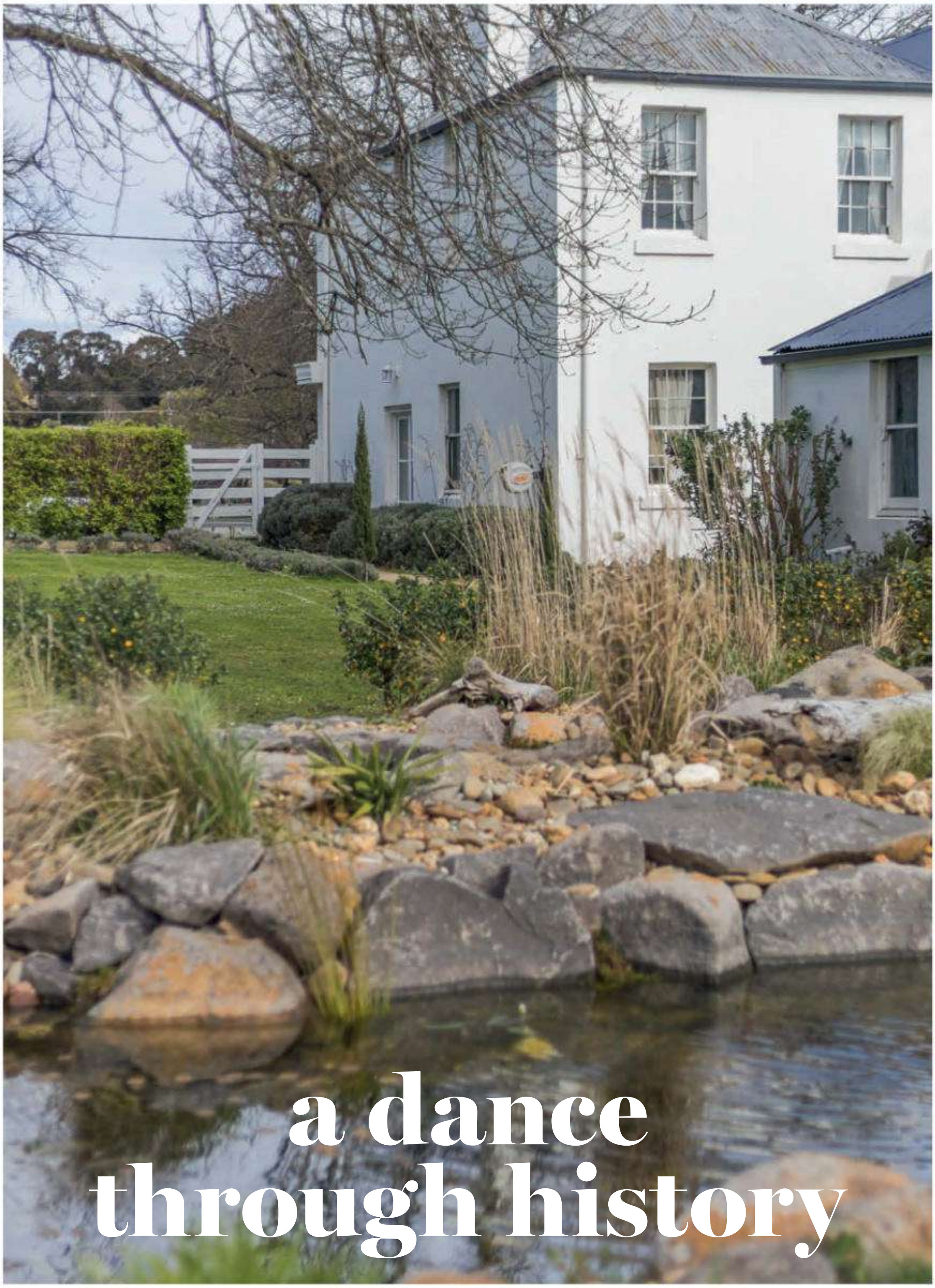
Islay House

THESE PAGES: Tarni and Clive spent 16 months restoring historic Islay House, a former hotel.



a dance through history

WITH A TASTE FOR TIMELESS EUROPEAN STYLING, A TELEVISION PRODUCER AND HER PARTNER LEAPT INTO A DRAMATIC TREE CHANGE AND THE DIY RENOVATION OF AN ICONIC COUNTRY PROPERTY.

BY PHOEBE HARTLEY, **PHOTOGRAPHY** TIFFANY WARNER

THESE PAGES: The front of the home has been converted into five B&B guestrooms, with a central kitchen connecting them and the couple's private living quarters at the back.

When the historic Islay House popped up for sale on Tarni James' computer screen, she says the two-storey colonial Georgian-style building leapt out at her. "I went, 'There it is, that's it, that's the one,'" she says with a laugh. "And so we jumped on it like a seagull on a hot chip."

The former ABC executive producer of programs including Shaun Micallef's *Mad as Hell* and *Hard Quiz* knew the solid-brick and weatherboard house needed a bit of love, and she and her partner, Clive Warner — a trained boat builder and furniture maker — were up to the task. "We love renovating old properties," Tarni says.

The Heritage-listed building sits on the main street of Woodend, 70 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, on Dja Dja Wurrung country in Victoria's picturesque Macedon Ranges. Established in 1860 as the British American Hotel, it was a welcoming rest stop for prospectors walking from Melbourne to Bendigo during the gold rush. Touted as the town's most recognised landmark, it had already been updated as a family home when Tarni and Clive took possession.

With a modest budget, the couple spent 16 months lovingly restoring

THESE PAGES: While renovating, the couple unearthed an original fireplace, which was hidden behind plasterboard.

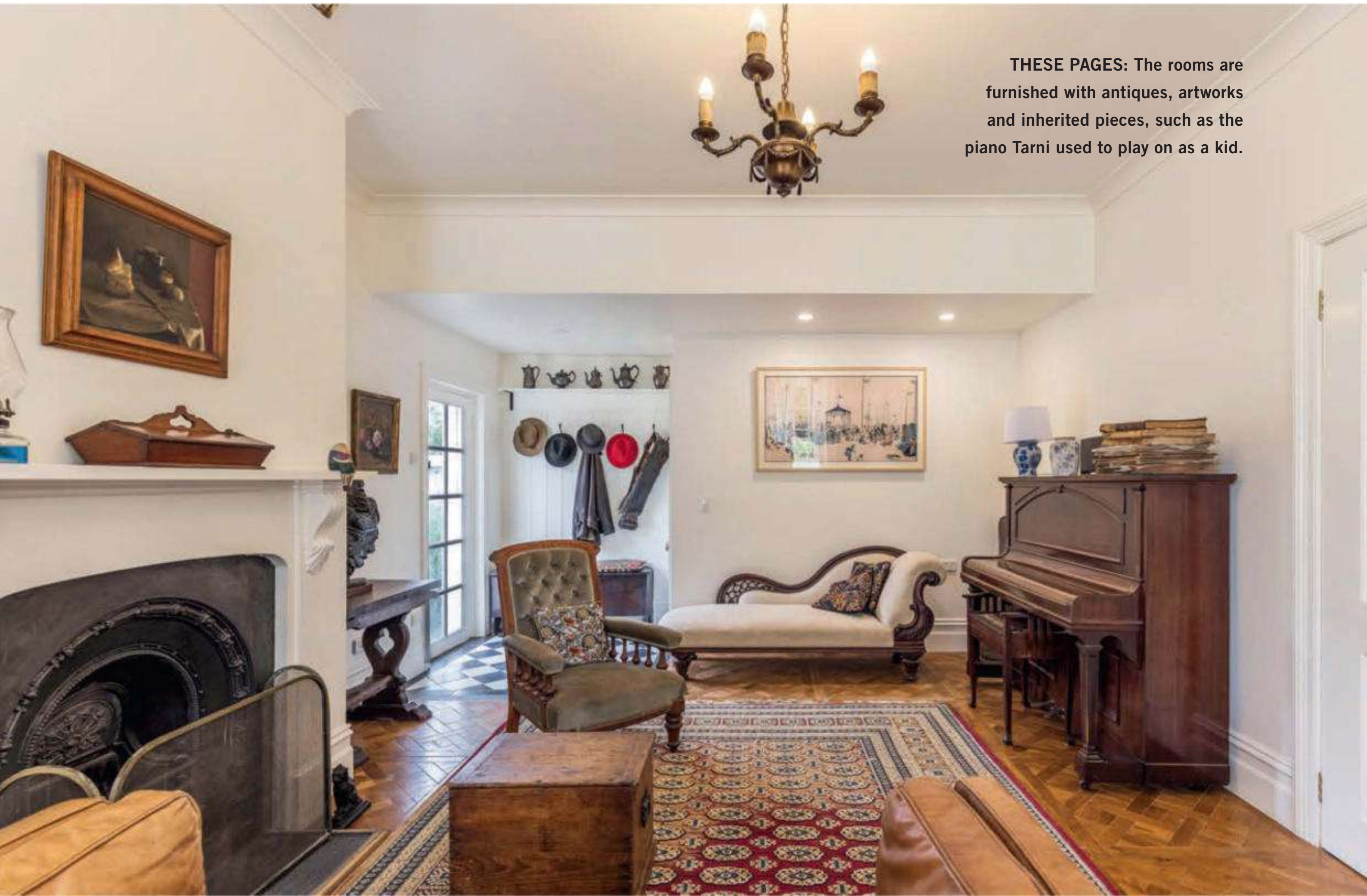
> *"We wanted the flow from the bedrooms to the bathrooms to be seamless, without a clash between modern elements and beautiful old materials.*

the converted coaching inn, undertaking most of the renovation themselves. They created a home for two in the back section of the property, in what used to serve as the original cookhouse and a bakery, which was separate from the main hotel. Now a private central kitchen joins the whole lot together, while the entire front has been converted into five high-end bed-and-breakfast guestrooms. "We designed to our taste, with influences from France, Greece, England, Scotland and Italy all coming together," Tarni says. "The key thing was to make every room fit our vision," Clive adds. "And to also be respectful to the history of the building."

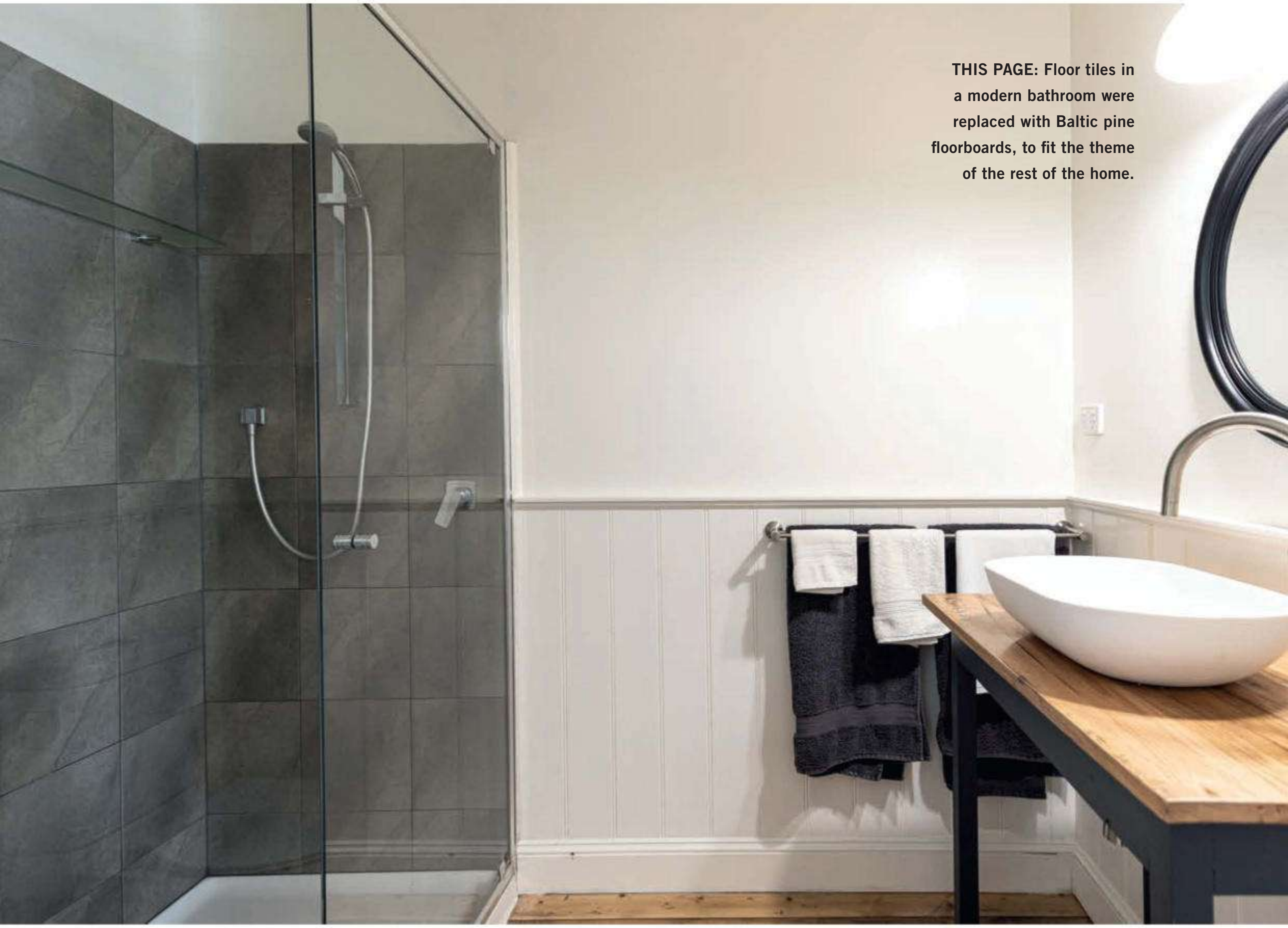
Clive reinstalled original elements to the facade of the house, stripping back the front door and recreating colonial wooden shutters for the windows. Townspeople regularly offer approval as they pass by. "There's a sense of ownership from the local community," Tarni says.

Inside, they removed interior walls, blocked up doorways, installed antique light fittings and ripped out modern cupboards and bookshelves. The reveal of a concealed fireplace was a nice surprise. "These gorgeous handmade bricks appeared behind the plasterboard like a hidden treasure," Tarni says. "Filthy work to remove it, but so rewarding," Clive adds. Floor tiles in the bathrooms were replaced with old Baltic pine, sourced second-hand. "We wanted the flow from the bedrooms to the bathrooms to be seamless, without a clash between modern elements and beautiful old materials," Clive says.

The guestrooms are furnished with antiques, original art and second-hand pieces inherited from Tarni's mother and a close family friend. "When I sit at the piano, I remember doing piano practice in her house, so there are lovely memories in a lot of the pieces," Tarni reminisces. Quirky touches complement the traditional styling. "We fashioned a writing nook out of an old kitchen dresser and repurposed a butter churn as a bedside table," Tarni says. "I hate waste, so finding and using existing elements was



THESE PAGES: The rooms are furnished with antiques, artworks and inherited pieces, such as the piano Tarni used to play on as a kid.



THIS PAGE: Floor tiles in a modern bathroom were replaced with Baltic pine floorboards, to fit the theme of the rest of the home.

important — I tried to save every bolt."

Outside, the magnificent 1400-square-metre grounds feature masses of lavender and English oak trees around lush lawns, which give the formal garden a regal feeling. Tarni and Clive added two large native garden beds featuring local Indigenous plants, "because I want to encourage native birds," Tarni explains. And a prolific vegetable garden feeds them. "Last summer, we didn't buy any vegetables," Tarni says. "But we got mighty sick of zucchinis."

With their previously busy inner-city life, Tarni and Clive originally had no plans to move to the country. But when Tarni's mother passed away in 2019, the family's Canterbury house was sold and Tarni was devastated to discover the backyard dance studio her mother had purpose-built was slated for demolition. Tarni's mother — a well-known local ballroom dancer who went by her stage name Merle Dalmaine — had taught classes in her studio until she was 96.

So a plan was hatched to rescue the dance studio. But could it really be done? "It was a crazy idea, to take down the studio and move it, brick by brick," Tarni says. "I was struggling to decide, so I thought I'll write down the pros and cons." Pulling a notebook at random from a stack on her desk, the answer came to her from beyond the grave. "I opened the book and, on the page, in my mother's handwriting, was a list of the materials she'd bought to build her dance studio and what it cost." With that, Tarni made the decision. "It was like staring into Mum's mind, it was fantastic."

The need for a country block on which to move the dance studio was the path that led Tarni and Clive to Islay House. And the rest is history — restored and reinvented. "We are now part of the history of this place," Clive says. "And we're bringing another layer to it." Thrilled with what they've achieved, Tarni senses her mother watching over them. "Every night I go outside and look at the stars, it's glorious," she says. "I feel like all this is honouring her." **AC**

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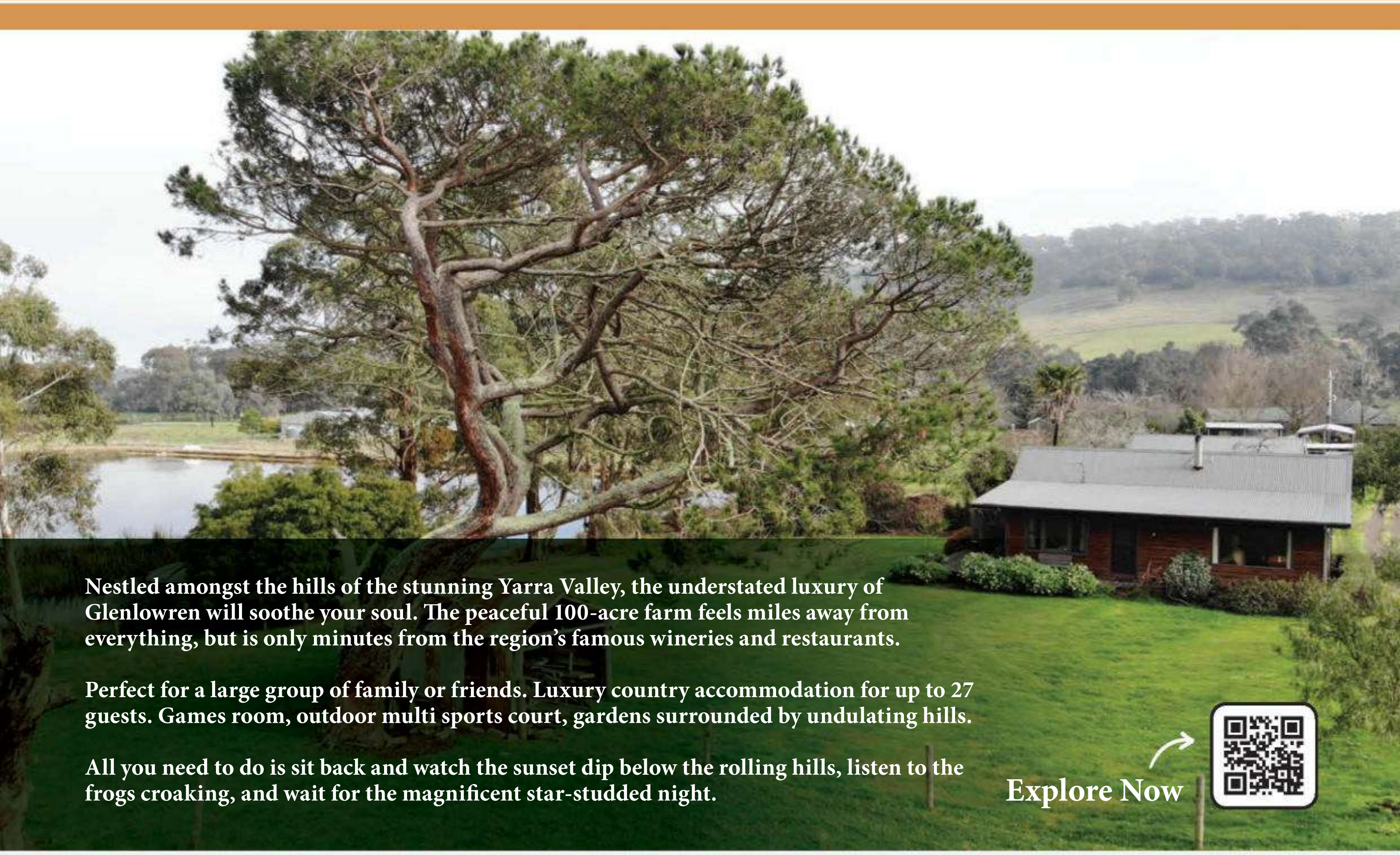

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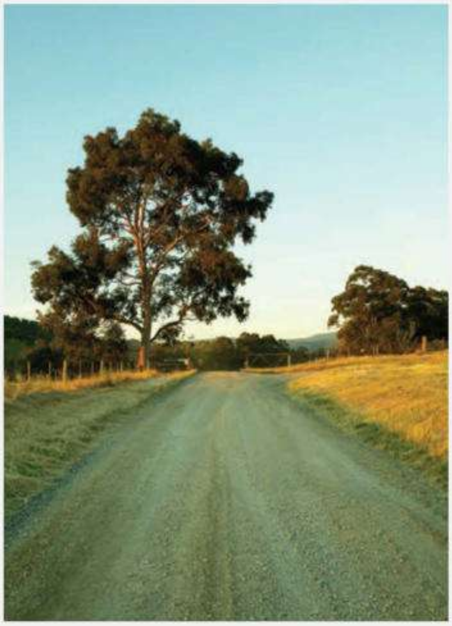

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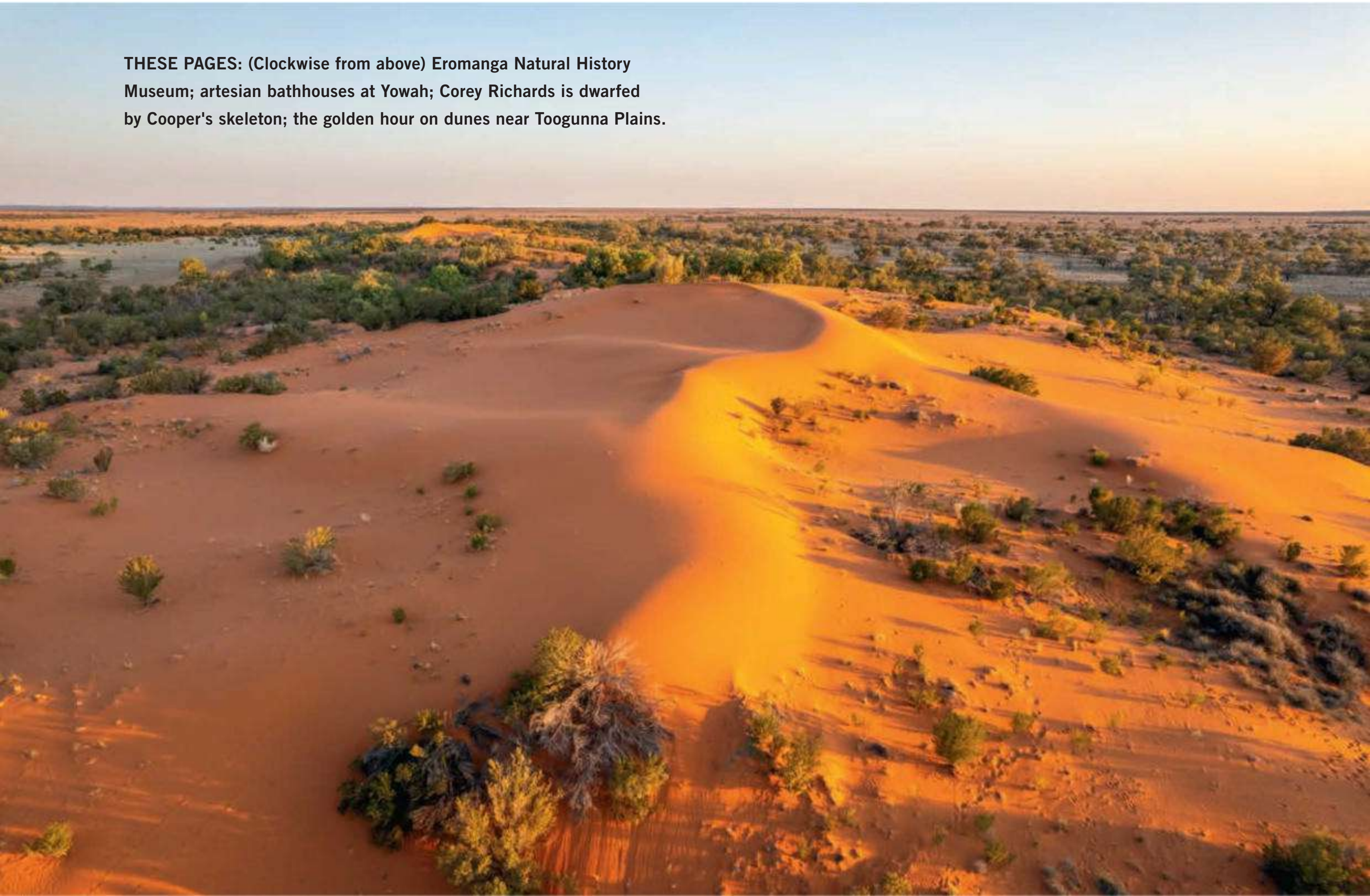
THESE PAGES: Sunset over Baldy Top lookout and the vast mulga-studded plains beyond Quilpie.

channel country charms

A 1000-KILOMETRE CIRCUIT THROUGH SOUTH-WESTERN QUEENSLAND REVEALS A HOST OF SURPRISES AND LEVEL OF AMENITY UNCOMMON IN THE OUTBACK.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEN BRASS

EROMANGA NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM



THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from above) Eromanga Natural History Museum; artesian bathhouses at Yowah; Corey Richards is dwarfed by Cooper's skeleton; the golden hour on dunes near Toogunna Plains.

Corey Richards is of average height, but he stands way below knee height beside the replica skeleton of the remains of Australia's largest dinosaur, *Australotitan cooperensis*. As the operations manager of the Eromanga Natural History Museum, Corey explains that when this giant grass-eating sauropod nicknamed Cooper roamed what is now the Channel Country of south-western Queensland in the mid-Cretaceous period some 95 to 98 million years ago, he was the third-largest creature on Earth (*Patagotitan* and *Argentinosaurus* from present-day South America just pipped him to top billing).

Weighing about 67 tonnes and measuring 30 metres long, Cooper and his slightly smaller distant relative, Zac, who is remarkable because he was an articulated fossil (his bones were found in anatomical order), were both discovered on Plevna Downs, an hour to the west of Eromanga. Fourteen-year-old Sandy Mackenzie was riding a bike across the paddocks in 2004 when he noticed an "unusual rock" on the ground. "His parents, Robyn and Stuart, brought it with them for identification when they took Sandy back to boarding school," Corey explains. "They became the driving force behind the museum, and still host twice-yearly digs on the station."

As each dig, which accepts paying volunteers to do the time-consuming work of excavation using brushes and pneumatic drills as fine as dental instruments, uncovers enough material to need 10 years of processing before eventual display, the museum has a huge backlog of bones waiting in its prep rooms. Not to mention a $15 million funding deficit, which its supporters remain ever hopeful a munificent benefactor or government funding will provide to build the second stage so they can display a life-sized replica of Cooper that's currently stored in sections in a shed.

Even if you weren't (well not yet) a dino devotee, it's worth travelling to the museum for the timeline video that begins each tour. As if the vast western Queensland landscape weren't enough to provide perspective, the video uses the road trip from Brisbane, 1060 kilometres to the east, to Eromanga, as an illustration for the Earth's history, beginning with the formation of the planet with the Hadean Eon some 4.6 billion years ago, travelling through the earliest form of life with the evolution of single-cell, oxygen-emitting stromatolites in the Archeon Eon, 3.5 billion years ago (at about Roma). Having finally made it through various ice ages, the age of dinosaurs and extinction, visitors finally arrive at the museum's carpark. The few-hundred-metre walk to the museum entry becomes the timeline's equivalent of the brief period that man has been on Earth.

Eromanga, the self-proclaimed most distant town from the sea in Australia, is also home to opal mines and gas and oil fields and is the most western point on this circuit

THESE PAGES: (From left) Glamping at Cunnamulla's Club Boutique Hotel; a hot bath at the bore on Charlotte Plains; Lauren Bond and son Teddy at the Toompine Hotel, the pub with no town.

trip, which loosely covers 1000km of the Channel Country from Cunnamulla, which itself is 790km south-west from Brisbane. No matter how you travel, there's no shortcut to this neck of the woods. The good news is that once you get there, your efforts will be rewarded so many times over, you'll wonder why you took so long to visit.

It is possible to fly (thanks to Rex Aviation) to Cunnamulla or Quilpie, 956km due west from Brisbane, but a car is an essential for exploring so it makes sense to make a road trip to the far south-west. Four-wheel drive is not needed as the entire route is sealed. But leave the Porsche at home, because some of the roads are single-track bitumen and you'll need to put two wheels on gravel to pass oncoming traffic. This can include road trains transporting livestock that measure more than 50m long. A bit of clearance will also be welcome when travelling some of the detours along the way.

The unexpected treats begin in Cunnamulla, at the Club Boutique Hotel, where Peieta Mills, whose family has lived in the region for generations and has turned the derelict 1936 Club Hotel into an oasis of comfort with ensuited guestrooms and five Bell tents behind the beer garden for glamping. Her vision has seen the down-at-heel watering hole turn into a social hub of town with a boho vibe, antique furnishings, Persian carpets on the floor and roses from her prolific garden on the tables. A tireless advocate for the region's attractions, Peieta sends guests to the new $12 million Cunnamulla Hot Springs, a wellness facility where visitors can soak in the mineral-rich waters of the Great Artesian Basin. She has also introduced paddles of craft beer, all named for Cunnamulla identities, to the bar offerings and there's nightly live entertainment in the dining room during the tourist season (from Easter to the end of September).

Travellers who prefer a swag, tent or caravan are spoilt for choice at Cunnamulla, where camping opportunities include Charlotte Plains station where there are 14 bathtubs set around a waterhole created by the bore that releases underground water to the surface at 42°C. Guests can take a bath while they watch for some of the 130 birds that have been recorded on the property or look for constellations in the bedazzling night sky. There's no lining up for a bath at Francvillers station, where a booking at the four bush camp sites guarantees exclusive access to one of the outdoor baths that are heated by a wood-fired "donkey" hot water system. Three campsites have water views of a lagoon or creek, while the fourth sits atop a ridge for commanding views of the sunset over the vast, lightly timbered plains.

From Cunnamulla, it's 67km to Eulo, where a sign at

THESE PAGES: (From this image) The straw bale guest cottage at Moble station; emus and other wildlife sightings are common; sunset on the dunes at Toogunna Plains station.

> *At 73,720km^2, the Bulloo Shire is Queensland's third largest. At the last census, that meant there were 218km^2 for every person who lives there.*

the entrance to town declares it's unAustralian not to have a beer at an outback pub, so a stop at the Eulo Queen is mandatory, along with a visit to the Eulo Mud Baths. This quirky venue is managed by Polish migrant Edyta Brumell. Patrons spend about 90 minutes in the open-air bathrooms, each with claw-footed bathtubs, rustic showers and wood-fired heaters for the cooler months. There's a "stretch" tub that fits two people comfortably, a room with four tubs and a couple's space. Guests first soak in muscle-relaxing, magnesium-rich, milky, clay-enhanced artesian water, then experience an exfoliating mud wrap followed by another bath and finally a deep moisturise.

From Eulo, head west for 129km to Thargomindah, a service town for the local sheep and cattle industry and home to Australia's first hydroelectric power plant, which was run from the Thargomindah bore. From "Thargo", the road narrows to single-track bitumen as it tracks west across stations for 160km to the turnoff to the Noccundra Hotel, built on Nockatunga station in 1882 from sandstone blocks shipped in by camel from Milparinka, 40km south of Tibooburra over the border in South Australia. With permanent water on the Wilson Creek, the pub was once a strategic watering stop for livestock and stockmen, and Noccundra pub once bustled with visitors en route from Adelaide and Broken Hill on their way to the Channel Country. These days, it's mainly tourists who come to Noccundra to camp on the waterhole, fish and kayak, and get to know the town's population of three — Neil and Marg Turner and their adult daughter, Sarah. As Sarah explains, space and social distancing are not an issue out here … at 73,720km^2, the Bulloo Shire is Queensland's third largest. At the last census, that meant there was 218km^2 for every person who lives there.

Retracing our route 20km back to the highway, it's another 160km to Eromanga, a very comfortable night at Cooper's Country Lodge in the grounds of the Natural History Museum and a counter meal at the Royal Hotel, once a Cobb & Co staging post built in 1885 from mud bricks. After dinosaurs, the other main attraction in town is opal mining, and you won't spend too long in the pub before you run into someone who has opal to sell.

The district's latest attraction is on the nearby 130,000-acre (52,609-hectare) Belombre station, run by the museum's Corey Richards' aunt, Fiona Ferguson, and her partner, Adam Walker. They opened Toogunna Plains station stay at the beginning of this year in acknowledgement that there wasn't enough accommodation in Eromanga for the growing visitor numbers and have quickly made the station a destination in its own right. The ensuited accommodation with 16 guestrooms in two wings is partly made from materials repurposed when several major windstorms destroyed the station's shearers' quarters and shed. Auxiliary buildings — refurbished railway workers' huts, a couple of caravans and two outback touring dental vans — have been cleverly made-over with recycled iron, hessian lining and Fiona's artistic eye to create a mini village with a level of amenity uncommon in the bush. While Adam takes visitors on a station tour that includes a visit to the remains of a Cobb & Co changing station, an explanation of exclusion fencing, lunch in the shearing shed and sunset drinks on a sand dune, Fiona is busy in the kitchen. Her CV as a homestead, shearing and mine camp cook belies the fact that she is a top-notch chef and, frankly, you'd visit the station for her meals alone. In a land of endless steak and schnitty, Fiona's homestead dinner of beef braised in red wine followed by blueberry almond cake is such a welcome reprieve, we could have stayed for a month. Tickets to the annual degustation dinner she cooks as a showcase of local produce for a fundraiser for the museum are hotly contested. Suffice to say, we're booking in for next year's event.

From Eromanga, it's 106km east to Quilpie, another little town that punches well above its weight. In town, there are landscape artist Lyn Barnes' gallery, a Catholic church with an opal altar, Country Collections shop and the restored 1926 Brick Hotel with cut-above counter meals to sample. Just 4km out of town, The Lake is a must-visit for campers and other guests who stay at the bush resort Dan and Louise Hoch have created around Lake Houdraman, a beautiful expanse of water surrounded by shady gums. Self-sufficent campers stay on the water's edge, caravaners stay closer to the amenities block and those who prefer a ready-made bed and kitchen have a choice of the remodelled shearers' quarters or two workers' cottages on the property. Dan and Louise,

THESE PAGES: Sunset views for campers at The Lake, outside Quilpie.

THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from right) Outdoor baths at Francvillers station; Cunnamulla Hot Springs; accommodation at Toogunna Plains farmstay; the 1882 Noccundra Hotel.

who run Merino sheep, cattle and Kalahari goats on the station and several other properties, provide station tours, sundowners are served in the bar every evening and many guests book into the lakeside bathhouse for a soak in the artesian-water filled tubs.

Another don't-miss station hospitality option is the Rutledge family on 120,000-acre (48,562ha) Moble station. See the story that begins on page 84 in this issue. But perhaps the most unexpected treat of the trip, if not the whole of outback Queensland, awaits those who take a 200km round-trip detour north to the town of Adavale, population 25, give or take, and almost as many cows mooching around the sparse landscape. A blue street sign on the approach to town announces a patisserie. Follow the sign to the "Paris end" of Adavale, where you'll find an unlikely mauve building in the middle of a paddock where Cristina Zito brings the panache of a high-end pâtissier to town. Entirely self-taught by online videos, Cristina serves exquisite mini gateaux, financiers, pithiviers and delicate tartlets during the season. She shuts in summer, when the soaring temperatures make it impossible to laminate butter into pastry. It's truly worth the detour, as they say in the Michelin guides.

From Quilpie, head south-east for 74km to Toompine, the "pub without a town", where long-term locals Stuart and Kate Bowen and their daughter, Lauren, and her husband, Sean Bond, have restored a pub built as a Cobb & Co station in 1893 to replace a former building that was destroyed in a fire.

From there, it's 155km back to Eulo. Or those who have become besotted by the fiery stone might opt for the 40km-return detour to the opal-mining settlement of Yowah, where there are chances to buy aplenty, yet more opportunities to bathe in artesian waters at the local hot pool or the bathhouse at the caravan park. There is also an opportunity for a round of golf on a course fashioned out of the gibber plain with not much green in sight. From Eulo, it's a short run back to the trip's starting point at Cunnamulla.

Back at the Eromanga Natural History Museum, a sign on a door reads *Sat cito si sat bene*, Latin for "Soon enough, if done well". It's a reference to what Corey calls "the ultimate act of delayed gratification" that is the palaeontologist's lot in life. If you take the time to sift through bucketloads of 500-micron overmatter from a dig, you might just discover a tiny speck that turns out to be a 100,000-year-old remnant of the jaw of an ancient geckonoid. It could just as well be a metaphor for this trip and the most important message from it: it's a long way to get there, so slow down and enjoy every aspect this extraordinary region has to offer. **AC**

PLACES TO STAY

- **Club Boutique Hotel, Cunnamulla** clubboutiquehotel.com
- **Francvillers Station Bush Camping, Cunnamulla** outbackescape.com
- **Charlotte Plains, Cunnamulla** charlotteplains.com.au
- **Cooper's Country Lodge, Eromanga** enhm.com.au/accommodation
- **Toogunna Plains, Eromanga** toogunnaplains.com.au
- **Artesian Waters Caravan Park, Yowah** Ph: (07) 4655 4991
- **Moble Homestead, Quilpie** moblehomestead.com.au
- **The Lake, Quilpie** thelakequilpie.com

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

- **Wildflowers, Cunnamulla** wildflowerscunnamulla.com.au
- **Toogunna Plains, Eromanga** toogunnaplains.com.au
- **Eulo Queen Hotel & Caravan Park, Eulo** euloqueenhotel.com.au
- **Noccundra Hotel, Nockatunga** Ph:(07) 4655 4317
- **South Western Hotel, Toompine** (07) 4656 4721
- **Royal Hotel, Eromanga** Ph:(07) 4656 4837
- **Brick Hotel, Quilpie** brickhotel.com.au
- **Elegant Emu, Adavale** elegantemu.com

WHAT TO DO

- **Cunnamulla Hot Springs, Cunnamulla** cunnamullahotsprings.com
- **Artesian Mud Baths, Eulo** artesianmudbathseulo.com.au
- **Hydro Power Plant, Thargomindah** explorebulloo.com.au/attractions/thargomindah/hydro-power-plant
- **Eromanga Natural History Museum, Eromanga** enhm.com.au
- **Lyn Barnes Gallery, Quilpie** lynbarnes.com
- **Country Collections, Quilpie** (07) 4656 1271

NOCCUNDRA HOTEL

THESE PAGES: Denbigh was added to the NSW State Heritage Register in 2006, a nod to its cultural and historical significance.

an organic process

THE MCINTOSH FAMILY HAS BEEN CUSTODIANS OF DENBIGH ON SYDNEY'S SOUTH-WESTERN PERIPHERY FOR 156 YEARS. THEY ARE WORKING HARD TO ENSURE THE PROPERTY REMAINS INTACT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEN BRASS

The smell of garden at Denbigh greets visitors long before they've even set eyes on the Clivia-lined driveway or the yellow bungalow homestead. The heady scent of jasmine in full bloom assaults the senses as guests arrive for Susie and Ian McIntosh's early spring open day.

The jasmine cascades over the front fence, climbs up tree trunks and tumbles over walls throughout the garden, which, in a sense, has been a work in progress since 1812. In that year, the property in the newly discovered Cowpastures district was granted to merchant Charles Hook as a reward for his loyalty to Governor Bligh during the military coup that became known as the Rum Rebellion.

Hook supplemented his 1000-acre (404-hectare) grant from Governor Macquarie with a further 200 acres (80ha). Wary of Aboriginal attack, he supervised the convict construction of the first building, a stables from locally quarried stone, which was protected by barred turret windows. He surrounded the property with a high paling fence, then sited other outbuildings around a forest red gum, which remains a focal point for the property to the present day and is estimated to be at least 230 years old. In 1817, Hook also started building the timber bungalow, which had a shingled hipped roof and broad verandahs decorated with a distinctive metal trim, possibly inspired, like the house itself, from time spent in India.

Following Hook's death, his wife, Sarah, sold Denbigh to the Reverend Thomas Hassall, better known as the "galloping parson" for the pace at which he covered his parish, which extended from Marulan to Parramatta, a distance of 160 kilometres and no mean feat on horseback. Thomas had spent time as a young boy on Tahiti where his parents were sent from London as missionaries. Susie believes that it was there, as a child playing with Tahitian children, that Thomas developed a respect for, and understanding of, Indigenous cultures that was shared by very few at the time. Sympathetic to Aboriginal people in the Cowpastures, Thomas took down the high fences around Denbigh and befriended those living there. The land was at the confluence of three language groups — Dharug, Tharawal and Gandangara — and as late as the 1850s, Thomas's son, James, recorded ceremonial gatherings at the front of the homestead. In 1838, Hassall Snr commenced work on a two-storey addition to the house made from bricks fired from clay found on the property.

As a child growing up at Denbigh, Ian recalls his grandparents living in the bungalow and his family in the extension. "There were French doors between the two buildings," he says. "They served as a kind of 'iron curtain'. We children only crossed over for afternoon tea and treats after school. Our grandparents came for Sunday roast dinners in the dining room of 'our section'."

The McIntosh family first leased Denbigh from Thomas's widow Anne, then bought the property in 1868. They bred draught horses for brewery carts and horse-drawn buses in Sydney, grew wheat and raised cattle. In 1910, the Denbigh Ayrshire stud was founded and, in 1971, the McIntosh family started a Holstein stud. Both have produced many champions at the Sydney Royal and local shows. Through the generations — Ian and Susie's children, Jamie and Mimi, are the sixth to call Denbigh home — the McIntoshes have added slab stables, hay sheds, milking bails, machinery sheds and silos.

The property supported a working dairy well into Ian's adult life, though it was no longer operating when Susie met Ian and moved in as a newlywed in the early 1990s. These days, the land is agisted and Ian and Susie have

THESE PAGES: Ian and Susie have dedicated many years to restoring the heritage buildings on Denbigh and maintaining the property's gardens.

THESE PAGES: (From this image) A postcard view of cows grazing on the land; a Clivia-lined driveway leads to the homestead.

THESE PAGES: Potters, friends and volunteers join Ian and Susie to raise funds for Foster a Potter, surrounded by the beautiful gardens, stonework and art installations at Denbigh.

> *“Old buildings need to be used or they can fall into the ground, so I’m always looking for ways to give them a new lease on life.*

spent the best part of the past two decades restoring the many heritage buildings.

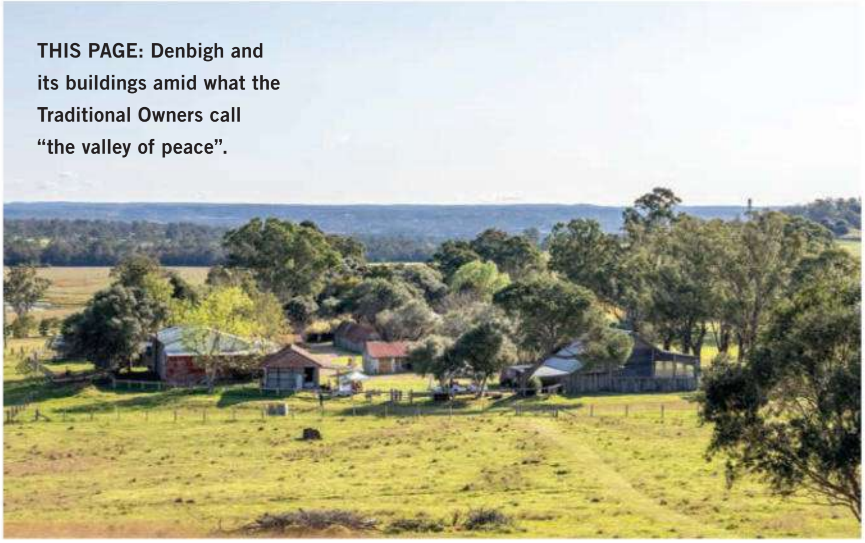
“When we became the custodians, we engaged [heritage architect] Alan Croker of Design 5 to come up with a conservation plan,” Ian says,

Serendipity comes in many guises and, for Ian and Susie, it began when a harness room wall collapsed. “We engaged builder James Haney to fix it,” Susie recalls. “He’s a truly remarkable tradesperson, more of an artist really. He patches rather than restores and he’s responsible for having saved and preserved many of our buildings. Without him, the Denbigh you see today would not exist.” James is also responsible for stone birdbaths in the garden and various metal installations around the grounds, which are among many artworks displayed.

Susie points to noteworthy original features of the grounds, including the wind-shielding western grove of African olive trees, initially imported by John and Elizabeth Macarthur who built nearby Camden Park. There’s also a towering bunya pine that was planted in the early days as a homestead marker, while ‘Old Blush’ China roses in the beds at the front of the bungalow are believed to be the first ever grown in the colony.

“While Denbigh always had a garden, Ian’s mother, Lesley, was responsible for most of the present-day structure,” Susie says. “I found the responsibility of taking over from her quite daunting, so we hired horticulturalist Gavin Noaks to advise us. Sadly, he passed away but his partner, Jodie Asher, has carried on helping in the garden and I’m indebted to her for maintenance and helping us get ready for charity open days.”

Since Denbigh was added to the NSW State Heritage Register in 2006, the McIntoshes and Ian’s cousin, Angela Head, have been successful in having a curtilage of 500 acres (202ha) created on their adjoining lands to protect this extraordinary remnant of colonial farm life. While suburbia may be creeping ever closer, they can rest assured that Denbigh and its buildings nestled in what the Traditional Owners call “the valley of peace”



THIS PAGE: Denbigh and its buildings amid what the Traditional Owners call "the valley of peace".

will be protected for future generations.

When *Australian Country* visited in early spring, Ian and Susie were full tilt preparing for an open day to support a fundraiser for one of Susie's passion projects, Foster a Potter. Potters from all over the Macarthur region and far-flung corners of the country were converging on the farm to display and sell their wares for the recently formed not-for-profit organisation. Modelled on an English institution called Adopt a Potter, the Australian version also promotes skills and knowledge in ceramics education by supporting and funding students to learn and work alongside experienced potters. "There are a lot of highly experienced master potters in this country," Susie says. "They have many skills to share with emerging artists and, truth be told, some of the older ones are getting on and could do with a bit of help with the heavy lifting of running a pottery. So Foster a Potter is a two-way exchange of resources. We're aiming to provide an emerging potter with a $10,000 grant to facilitate that partnership, whether it's to pay for accommodation or travel to get to work with the mentor of their choosing."

A potter herself, Susie says she came to the art as a distraction from her work as a psychotherapist. "I was hopeless at art at school as I couldn't draw to save myself," she explains. "But I've always collected pottery, even as a young backpacker, I bought pieces and brought them home. I actually took up potting as a form of therapy for myself and discovered that there's something very centring, almost meditative, about having your hands in clay."

Having been loaned a wheel, Susie practised for about six months before she was accepted into a course at Sturt Gallery and Studios at Mittagong in the NSW Southern Highlands. A decade down the track, she is now well established as a potter and has her studio in the stone stables building at Denbigh.

"A lot of talented artists have helped me along the way," Susie says. "I began thinking about how it would be good to formalise that sharing of expertise." As it turned out, master potter Jean McMaster from Herberton on Queensland's Atherton Tableland was arriving at the same viewpoint at the same time. In collaboration with artist, teacher and former executive director of the Australian Ceramics Association, Vicki Grima, they've become directors of Foster a Potter, which they hope will grow over time to encourage many other enthusiasts to embrace the art. More than 700 visitors came to the recent Denbigh open day, which added a significant injection of almost $20,000 to the Foster a Potter fundraising effort.

"We're indebted to all the potters who came and ran pottery demonstrations over the weekend, and more than 40 friends who did everything from supervising parking and ticket sales, running the cafe and sausage sizzle to clearing out sheds for exhibition spaces," Susie says. "I'm mindful that old buildings need to be used or they can fall into the ground, so I'm always looking for ways to give them a new lease on life."

While Susie looks to her "muddy friends" to keep Denbigh ticking along, Ian has his own plans for using the property to make a positive impact on the community. For many years, he's been planting trees as part of his dream to restore the landscape to the original Cumberland Plains woodland. Recently, however, his efforts received a significant boost when he was approached by Wilding Western Sydney, which aims to restore the original ecology to parkland tracts in the region. "Scientists will evaluate the property, collect seeds from remaining species and revegetate the land," Ian says. "Plants that no longer grow here will be reintroduced and biodiversity restored. I believe in allowing things to happen organically. We know what we want to achieve to preserve Denbigh and, by bringing the right people together, it's been remarkable the way things have evolved to make it happen." **AC**

For more information on Foster a Potter, visit fosterapotter.com.au.

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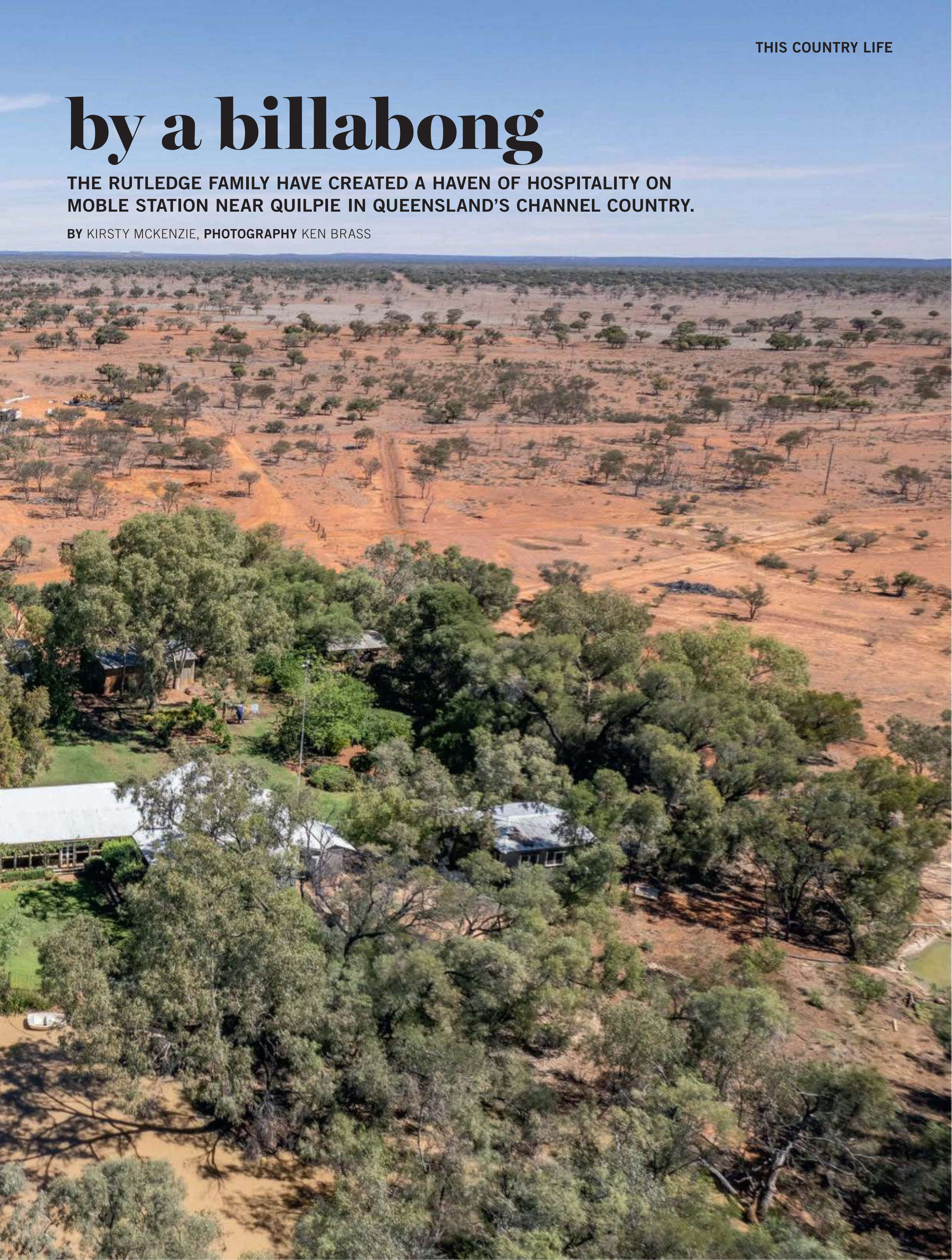
THESE PAGES: A bird's-eye view of the homestead on Moble station, its outbuildings and the vast arid land surrounding it.

by a billabong

THE RUTLEDGE FAMILY HAVE CREATED A HAVEN OF HOSPITALITY ON MOBLE STATION NEAR QUILPIE IN QUEENSLAND'S CHANNEL COUNTRY.

BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE, **PHOTOGRAPHY** KEN BRASS



For a family who's kept a station diary every day for the past 100 years, it's a bit surprising that there's some contention over the installation of a billabong that gives the homestead at Moble station its "sea" breezes and water views.

In Meg Rutledge's version of events, it was a wedding gift from her grandfather for her parents, Brian and Kylie, when they married in 1985. Brian's recollection is more pragmatic: yes, the diversion of TU Creek was created at that time, but not so much as a gift, more as a sign of his father's constant attention to water supply on the 120,000-acre (48,562-hectare) property in the Quilpie district of south-western Queensland.

"Water is a precious resource out here," Brian says. "We've always been very careful how we manage it." As Meg's husband, Lachland "Lachy" Dean explains, Moble is on "marginal grazing land" in the bioregion known as the Channel Country on the edge of the more arid land bordering the Corner Country of north-western NSW, far western Queensland and South Australia's far north-east. The Rutledge family has traditionally raised Merino sheep and Shorthorn/Santa Gertrudis cross cattle, but more recently they've added rangeland goats to their portfolio, as goats browse on the mulga trees and don't compete with the other livestock for grass.

Meg and Lachy's children, Frank, who is almost two, and his little brother, who will be born at the end of 2024, represent the fifth generation of Rutledges to live on Moble. Meg's great-great grandfather, Frank, bought Wambin, the place next door in 1914, just as he waved his three sons off to the First World War. Tragically, the middle son didn't make it home, as he was killed in the Middle East. In an intriguing footnote to this part of history, alongside the family diaries, the Rutledges have a framed Reuters telegram announcing the armistice and a room key that their forebears souvenired from the hotel where they were staying in Cairo, Egypt.

Moble's non-Indigenous history goes back to the early European settlement of the region as American surveyor Thomas Underwood, who had come to Australia after the Civil War, travelled through in 1867 naming Moble Creek for Mobile in Alabama. This was just six years after explorers Burke and Wills made their ill-fated journey crossing Australia from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria and perished in the desert on their return journey in 1861. Two years after Underwood, pioneering pastoralist Patrick Durack and his in-laws, the Costellos, camped on Moble Creek for nine months, while they sent a team down the Strzelecki Track to Adelaide to sell spare horses. They established Thylungra and Kyabra stations as well as properties around Adavale, Thargomindah, Windorah and Roma before heading 4800 kilometres north-west in the 1880s to establish their "grass castles" in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

When the Rutledges bought Moble in 1923, Brian's grandfather (also Brian) moved there with his bride, Mary Borthwick, who grew up on the adjacent Whynot station. Brian and Kylie now live in the original homestead, which was shipped to the station by bullock wagon from Adavale while Meg, Lachy and Frank now live in an extended overseer's hut, on the other side of the billabong.

THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from top) Lachy and Meg with son, Frank, and Meg's parents, Kylie and Brian; although surrounded by arid land, the homestead's gardens are brimming with greenery; a bridge over the billabong.

THESE PAGES: the family's love of entertaining has led them to turn two outbuildings and a two-bedroom cottage on the property into guest accommodation.

> “*You can drive past and think there’s not much to see but, if you just slow down and take in the landscape, it reveals itself in remarkable ways.*

Until 2012, the Rutledges were in the fortunate position of having relatives as neighbours on either side.

Kylie, who grew up in Brisbane, came to the district as a governess to Brian’s cousin’s family on Wambin. “I was meant to have six months off before I went to uni to do agricultural science,” she says. “But I met Brian and never made it back to Brisbane.”

Instead, Brian and Kylie raised four daughters and Kylie, the occasional governess, sometimes assisted by visiting VICE (Voluntary Isolated Children’s Education) teachers, supervised their primary school education until they went to boarding school. Clearly, it was a good start in life for the Rutledge sisters as Felicity is a vet living in London, Sarah, who now lives in Toowoomba after five years in the US, works for JBS Foods, marketing Australian meat to America, and Betsy is a solicitor in Brisbane. Meg, who holds a Bachelor of Business and Agriculture, worked in the NT after school, and then for AACo, which owns and operates Australia’s largest beef herd, after graduation, where she became the pastoral giant’s livestock manager, before heading overseas for two years. “I worked for HelloFresh in London during its start-up period,” she says. “Our whole family is keen on cooking, so it was a great fit. In between work, I was able to backpack around Europe, which was also a great experience. For a while, I lived with a family in southern Spain. They hosted guests, which gave me the idea of doing something similar at Moble when I came home.”

Meg moved back to the bush in 2017 to help on the station. She met Lachy, who was working on Herbertvale in Queensland’s remote Gulf country, at a race meeting in Longreach. They had a long-distance relationship until he moved down to Quilpie three years ago and they were married. Lachy has a strong creative bent and there’s evidence of his handiwork in the kitchen stools he made with seats fashioned from cross-sections of repurposed cattle-yard timber as well as other functional and decorative pieces throughout the house and garden.

“We’re a family of entertainers and we always had guests,” Meg says. “It just made sense to extend that hospitality to paying visitors. Wool was traditionally our income mainstay [a ribbon for fleece of the highest commercial value from the recent Quilpie show proves their sheep can still hold their own in this arena] but we needed to diversify into something that’s less dependent on the seasons.”

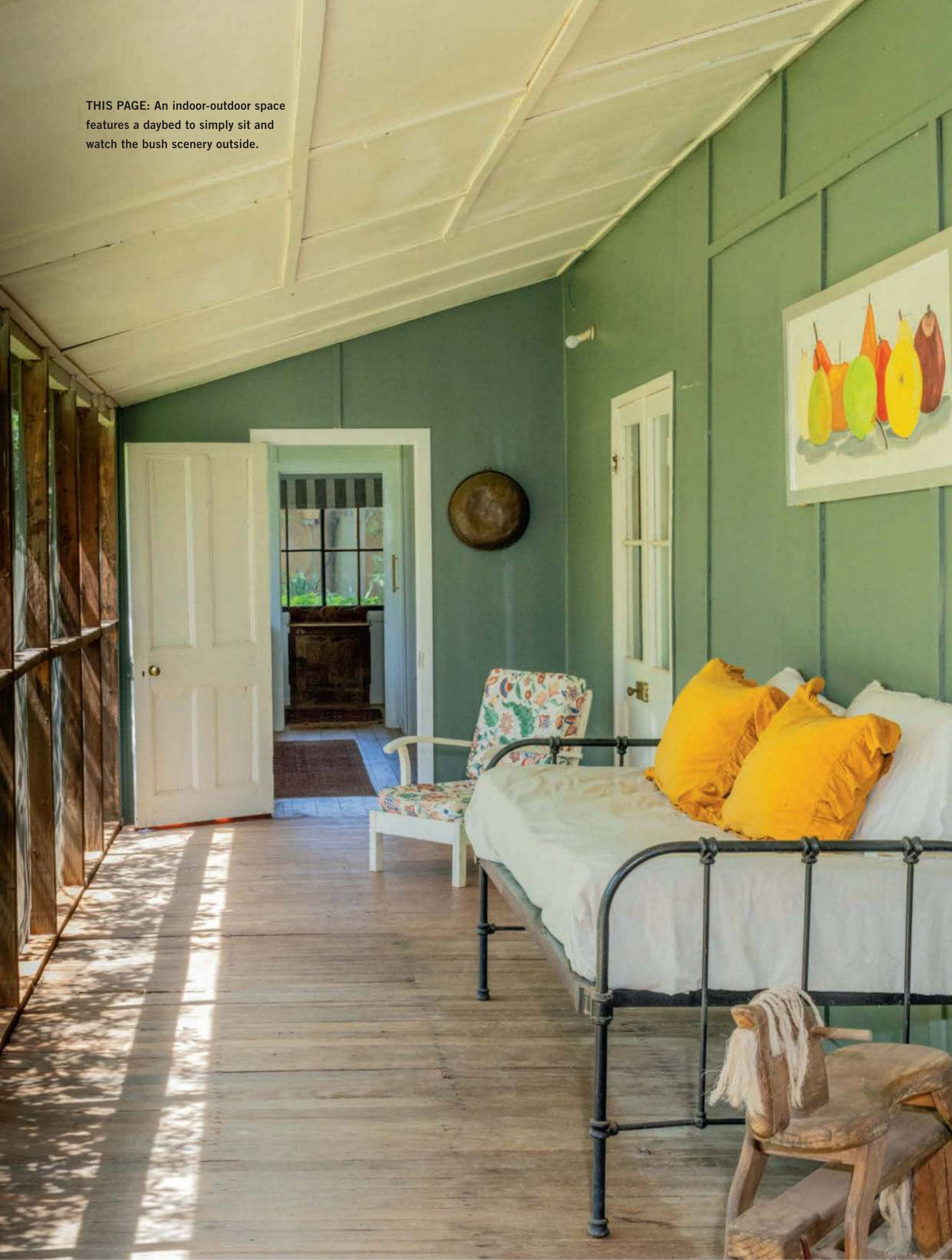
The Rutledges have converted an outbuilding that had served as the children’s schoolroom and a two-bedroom cottage that once was jackaroo quarters for guest accommodation. Kylie also built a straw bale guestroom in the homestead’s beautiful gardens to add another bedroom, and all three options have rustic outdoor bathing facilities.

The entire family pools their skills to offer guest entertainment, which often includes bush walks led by Kylie on trails that showcase the natural environment. Guests might finish a walk by collecting wildflowers to make an arrangement or tussie mussie for the bedside table. Another offering is an en plein air painting workshop conducted by local artist Lyn Barnes. Brian also has considerable metalwork skills and shares his knowledge with visitors who book in for regular two-day workshops, where they learn to weld and bend metal to build their own works ranging from gates and fences to furniture and sculpture.

“Quilpie has an amazing artistic community,” Kylie says. “I think there’s something about the isolation that everyone feels they can explore their creativity without being judged. It’s wonderful how painting the landscape opens people’s eyes to what’s around them. That’s also why I always guide our guests on the walks. By pointing out features and sharing our story, I feel I’m helping to bring the landscape alive.”

Camping is another way of introducing guests to the

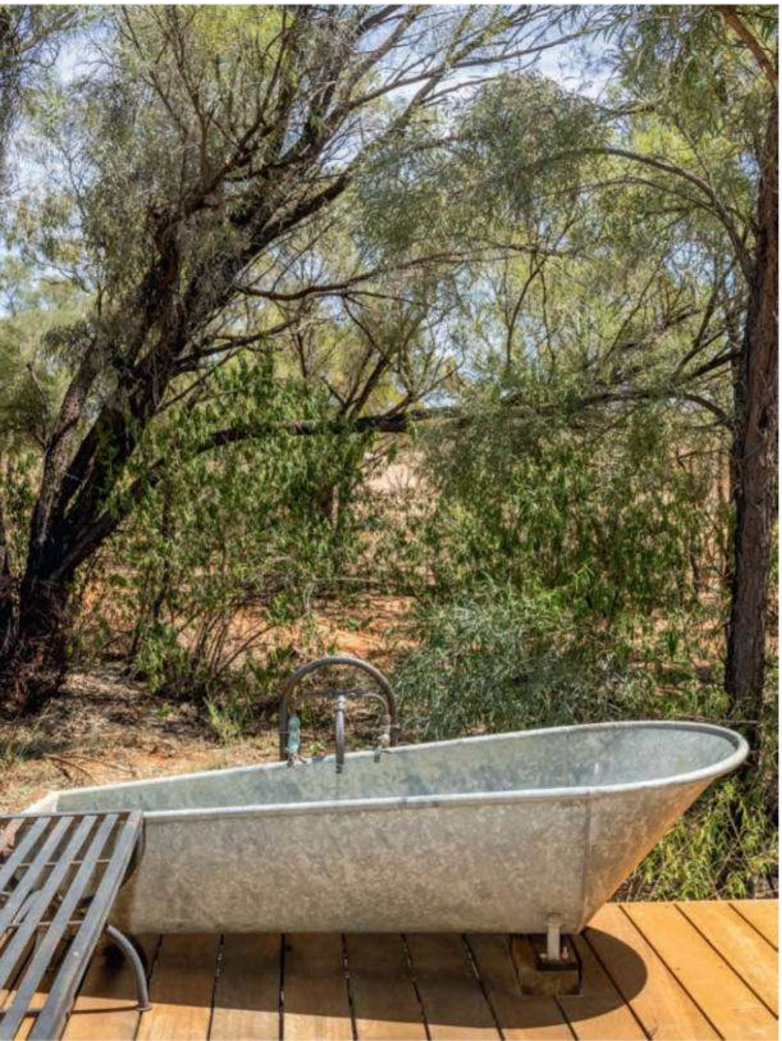
THIS PAGE: An indoor-outdoor space features a daybed to simply sit and watch the bush scenery outside.



Rutledges' world and they have established a permanent site with a hot shower and a flushing toilet, so visitors can experience sleeping under the stars in swags in style. "We've always been a family of campers," Meg says. "Dad would literally take the kitchen sink and Mum always packed a tablecloth, so our style of camping is not without creature comforts."

With soon-to-be two little ones to care for, Meg has currently scaled down their hospitality offerings, though they plan to be back in full swing for the tourist season — Easter to October — of 2026. "It's wonderful to see how much people gain from station visits," she says. "You can drive past and think there's not much to see but, if you just slow down and take in the landscape, it reveals itself in remarkable ways. We're lucky enough to enjoy those experiences every day, so we love sharing them." **AC**

Gum Ck Tank:
A Bloody
Long Way



THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from above) The formal dining space; the road to Moble; each of the three guest options features outdoor bathing facilities; a rustic bedroom; bush signage to raise a smile.

framed on farm

WITH A CAMERA ALWAYS ON HAND, CHARLIE KILMINSTER HOPES TO BRIDGE THE CITY-COUNTRY DIVIDE AND CREATE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGES FARMERS FACE.

THESE PAGES: (from this image) *Two Trees*; Photographer Charlie Kilminster on the land he loves.

Growing up in Western Australia's Central Wheatbelt inspired 16-year-old Charlie Kilminster from Bruce Rock to pick up a camera and showcase his home country in all its glory. "I've always been fascinated by the vast open spaces, the rolling hills and the rich agricultural land that surrounds me," he says. "I wanted to capture the beauty of the landscape, the people and the stories that make this region so unique. But I also wanted to highlight the challenges that come with living in a rural area, the struggles that farmers face and the impact of climate change on our environment."

As a boarder at Perth's Wesley College, Charlie has learnt much about the food industry and the disconnect between consumers and the source of their food. "I've realised that most people have no idea where their food comes from, how it's produced or the impact it has on the environment and the people involved," he says. "This sparked a desire to use my photography skills to educate and raise awareness about the food system. My ultimate goal is to create a more conscious and appreciative food culture. I want people to understand that the food they eat is not just a commodity, but a product of human labour, dedication and passion. I want to inspire people to make informed choices about the food they eat, supporting local, sustainable and equitable food systems."

While he's home on school holidays Charlie aims to share his appreciation for the land and the people who work it with a wider audience. His camera has become an extension of his passion, allowing him to share his perspective with the world.

"I've seen firsthand the effects of drought, the struggles of farmers to make ends meet and the impact of isolation on mental health," he says. "But I've also seen the resilience of the community, the kindness of strangers and the beauty of the landscape that surrounds us. Through my lens, I try to highlight the good, the bad and the ugly. I want to inspire others to appreciate the beauty of rural life, to understand the challenges that come with it and to support the people who call this region home."

CASE
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THESE PAGES: (Clockwise from top left) *Big Red Tractor*; *Sun Setting over Country*; *Sheeping Around*; *Work on the Land*.

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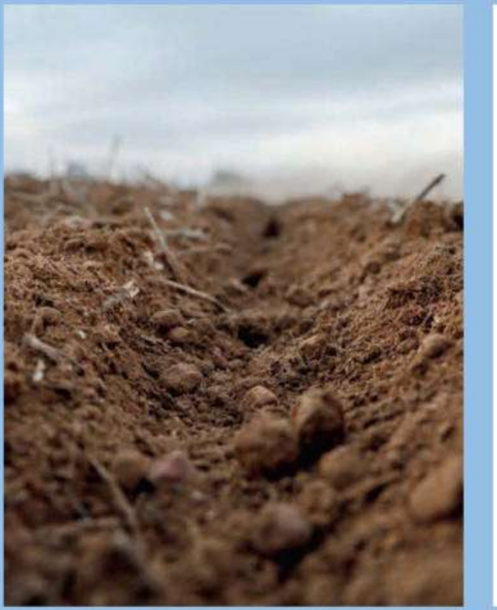

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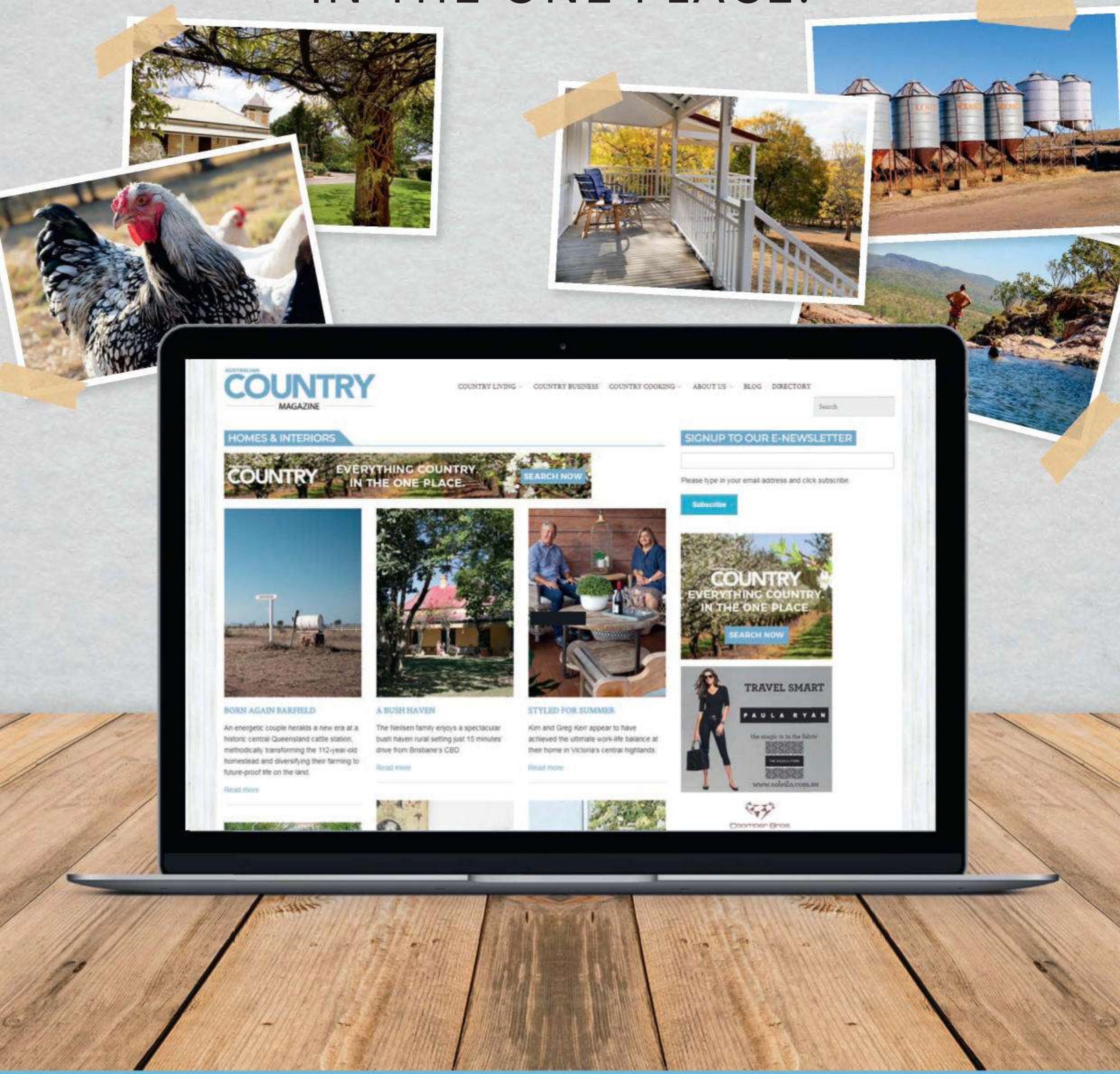
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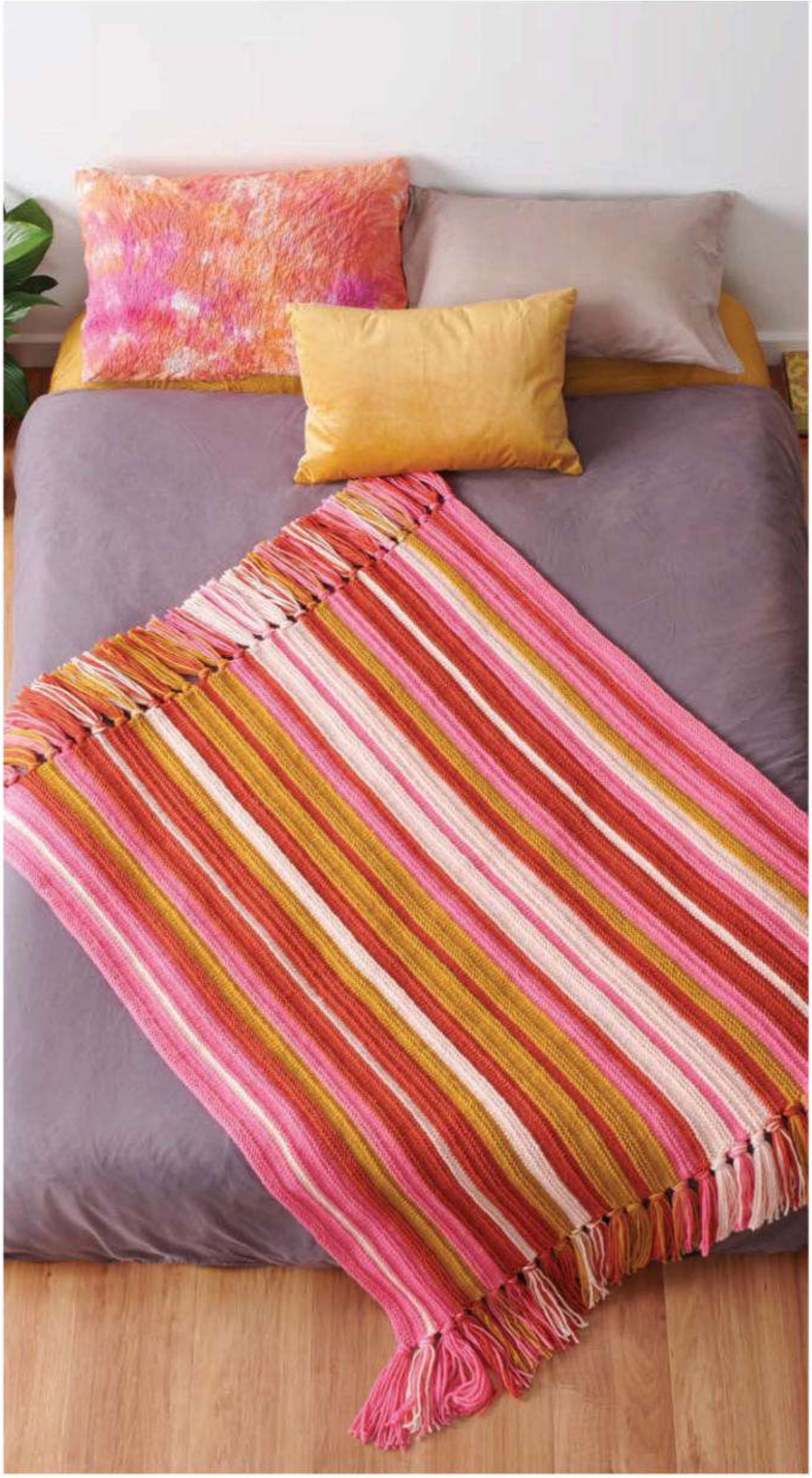


KNIT YOUR LIVING SPACE AN INJECTION OF COOL COLOUR WITH THIS STYLISH TASSELLED THROW.

MEASUREMENTS
Width (approx.) 120cm
Length (approx. excluding fringe) 130cm

MATERIALS
7 x 125g balls Heirloom Merino Magic Chunky (6209 Rust)
6 x 125g balls Heirloom Merino Magic Chunky (6595 Hot Pink)
5 x 125g balls Heirloom Merino Magic Chunky (6570 Buckwheat)
5 x 125g balls Heirloom Merino Magic Chunky (6573 Tutu Pink)
Use only the yarn specified. Other yarns are likely to produce different results. Quantities are approximate as they can vary between knitters. Ensure all yarn of the same colour is from the same dye lot.

NEEDLES AND EXTRAS
6.5mm (UK 3) circular knitting needle (100cm long)
Piece of cardboard 20cm wide and crochet hook

TENSION
14 sts and 24 rows to 10cm over pattern, using 6.5mm needles. Correct tension is not essential for this throw, however stated measurements and yarn quantities are based on this tension.

ABBREVIATIONS
garter st = every row knit; st, sts = stitch, stitches; stocking st = knit 1 row, purl 1 row

THROW (worked sideways)

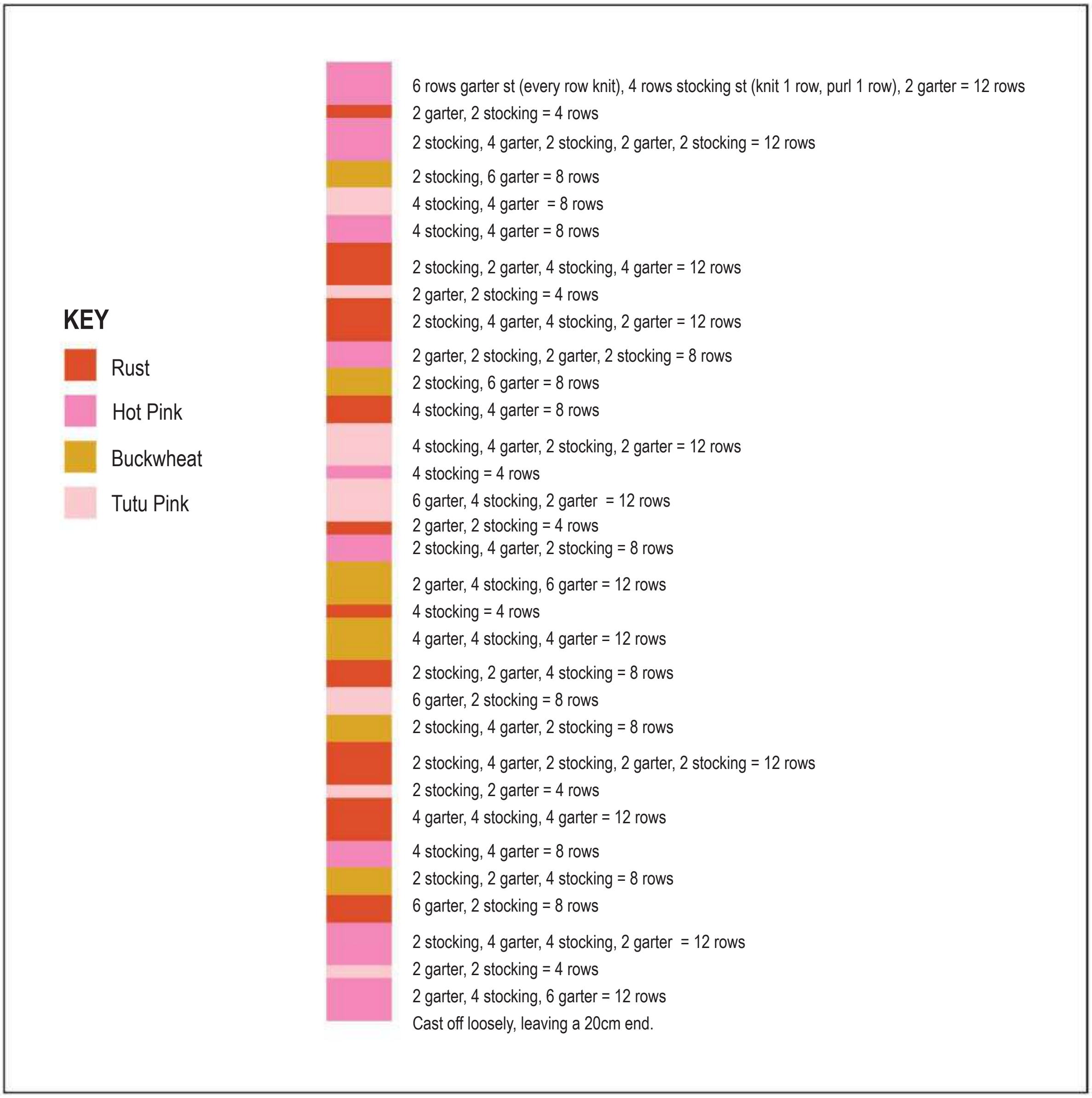
Using 6.5mm circular needle and Hot Pink, cast on 180 sts loosely, leaving a 20cm end.

NOTE A circular needle is used to accommodate the large number of sts. Work backwards and forwards in rows. Leave a 20cm end at beginning and after every colour change to use in fringe.

Work 276 rows in colours indicated in below diagram.

FRINGES

Wind yarn around piece of cardboard and cut along one edge. With right side facing, fold 11 strands (corresponding to stripe colour/s) in half and using crochet hook, draw loop through side edge. Draw ends through loop, at same time catching in yarn ends and pull to tighten. Work 33 fringe knots in total along each edge. Trim neatly.



6 rows garter st (every row knit), 4 rows stocking st (knit 1 row, purl 1 row), 2 garter = 12 rows
2 garter, 2 stocking = 4 rows
2 stocking, 4 garter, 2 stocking, 2 garter, 2 stocking = 12 rows
2 stocking, 6 garter = 8 rows
4 stocking, 4 garter = 8 rows
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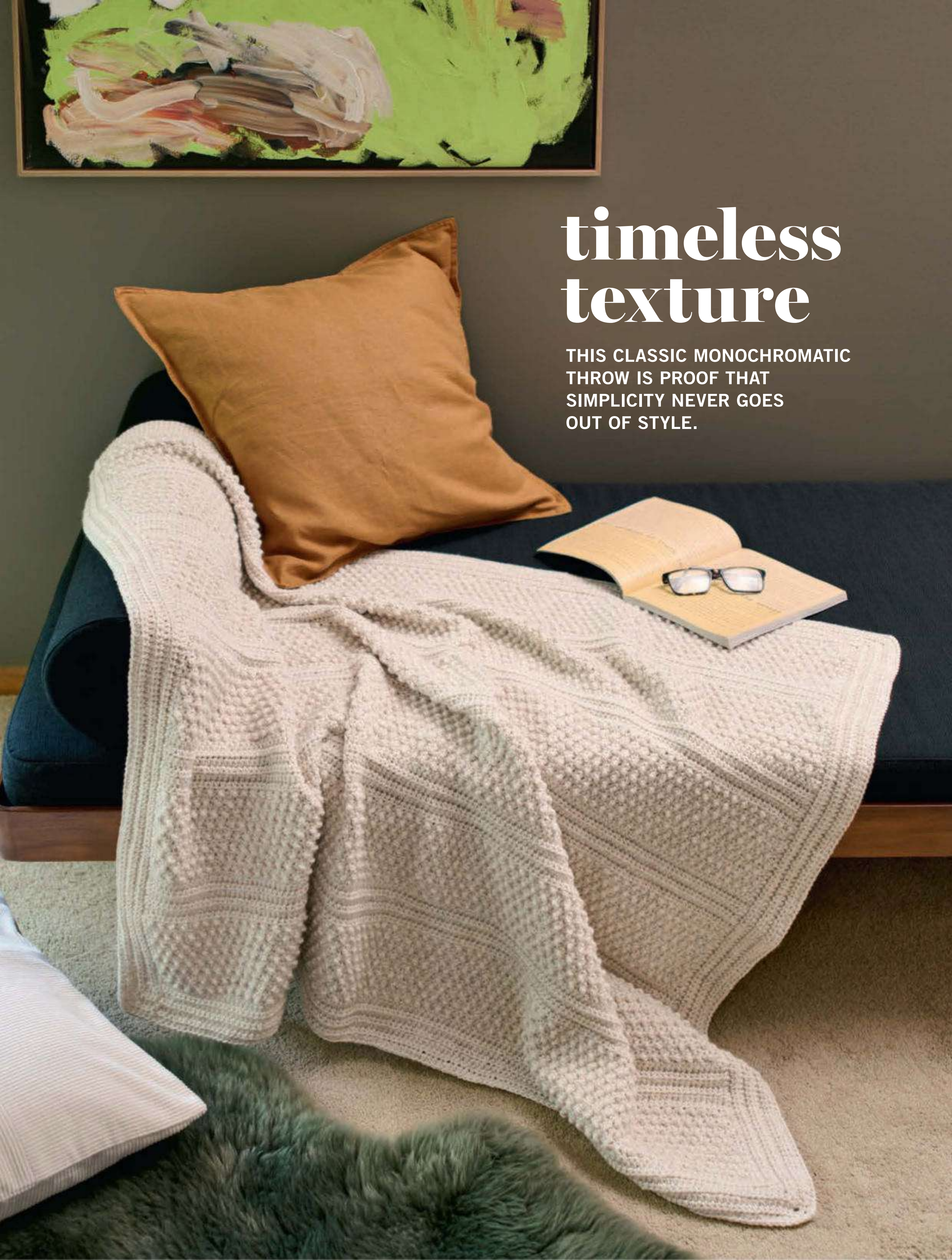
4 stocking, 4 garter = 8 rows
2 stocking, 2 garter, 4 stocking = 8 rows
6 garter, 2 stocking = 8 rows
2 stocking, 4 garter, 4 stocking, 2 garter = 12 rows
2 garter, 2 stocking = 4 rows
2 garter, 4 stocking, 6 garter = 12 rows
Cast off loosely, leaving a 20cm end.



timeless texture

THIS CLASSIC MONOCHROMATIC THROW IS PROOF THAT SIMPLICITY NEVER GOES OUT OF STYLE.

MEASUREMENTS

Width (approx.) 120cm
Length (approx.) 90cm

MATERIALS

25 x 50g balls Cleckheaton Country 8 ply (0019 Beige Marle)
Use only the yarn specified. Other yarns are likely to produce different results. Quantity is approximate as it can vary between crocheters. Ensure all yarn is from the same dye lot.

HOOK AND EXTRAS

4.5mm crochet hook
Wool needle for sewing in ends

TENSION

15 sts and 17 rows to 10cm over Texture patt, using 4.5mm hook. Correct tension is not essential for this throw, however stated measurements and yarn quantity are based on this tension.

ABBREVIATIONS

beg = begin, beginning; ch = chain; dc = double crochet; dtr = double treble; htr = half treble; lp, lps = loop, loops; patt = pattern; rep = repeat; sl st = slip stitch; sp, sps = space, spaces; st, sts = stitch, stitches; yoh = yarn over hook

NOTE Australian/UK crochet terminology used throughout.

THROW

Using 4.5mm hook, make 2ch.
Work from diagram or written instructions as follows:
Foundation dc row — Miss 1ch, insert hook in next ch, yoh and draw yarn through, yoh and draw through 1 lp (ch made), yoh and draw through 2 lps (dc made), * insert hook in ch made, yoh and draw yarn through, yoh and draw through 1 lp (ch made), yoh and draw through 2 lps (dc made), rep from * 163 times ... 165dc.

BEG TEXTURE PATT

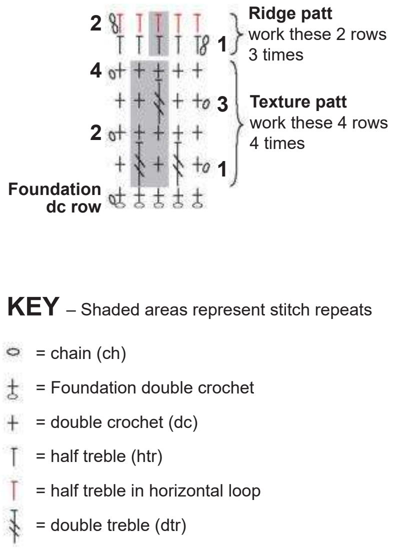
NOTE Ensure all dtr form texture on right side.
1st row (right side) – 1ch, 1dc in first dc, * 1dtr in next dc, 1dc in next dc, rep from * to end.
2nd row — 1ch, 1dc in each st to end.
3rd row — 1ch, 1dc in each of first 2dc, * 1dtr in next dc, 1dc in next dc, rep from * to last dc, 1dc in last dc.
4th row — As 2nd row.
Last 4 rows form Texture patt.
Work a further 12 rows.

BEG RIDGE PATT

1st row — 2ch (does not count as a st), 1htr in first st, * 1htr in each st to end.
2nd row — 2ch (does not count as a st), 1htr in horizontal lp of each htr to end.
Rep last 2 rows twice.
Last 6 rows form Ridge patt.
Rep (16 rows Texture patt then 6 rows Ridge patt) 4 times, then work 16 rows Texture patt.

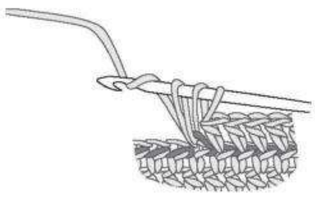
BORDER

1st round — 2ch, 1htr in each dc to corner, 3htr in corner, work htr evenly along side edge to next corner, 3htr in corner, 1htr in each ch of Foundation row to corner, 3htr in corner, work htr evenly along side edge to beg, 1htr in same sp as 2ch at beg, sl st in 2nd ch, turn.
2nd round — 2ch, * 1htr in horizontal lp of each htr to corner, 3htr in horizontal lp of corner htr, rep from * twice, 1htr in horizontal lp of each htr to end, 1htr in same place as first htr, sl st in 2nd ch at beg, turn.
3rd round – 2ch, * 1htr in each htr to corner, 3htr in corner htr, rep from * twice, 1htr in each htr to end, 1htr in same place as first htr, sl st in 2nd ch at beg, turn.
Rep last 2 rounds once, then 2nd round once. Fasten off. **AC**

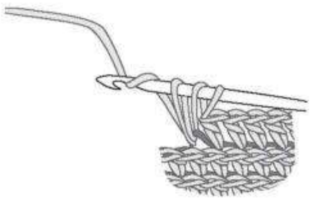


WORKING INTO HORIZONTAL LOOP OF HALF TREBLE (HTR)

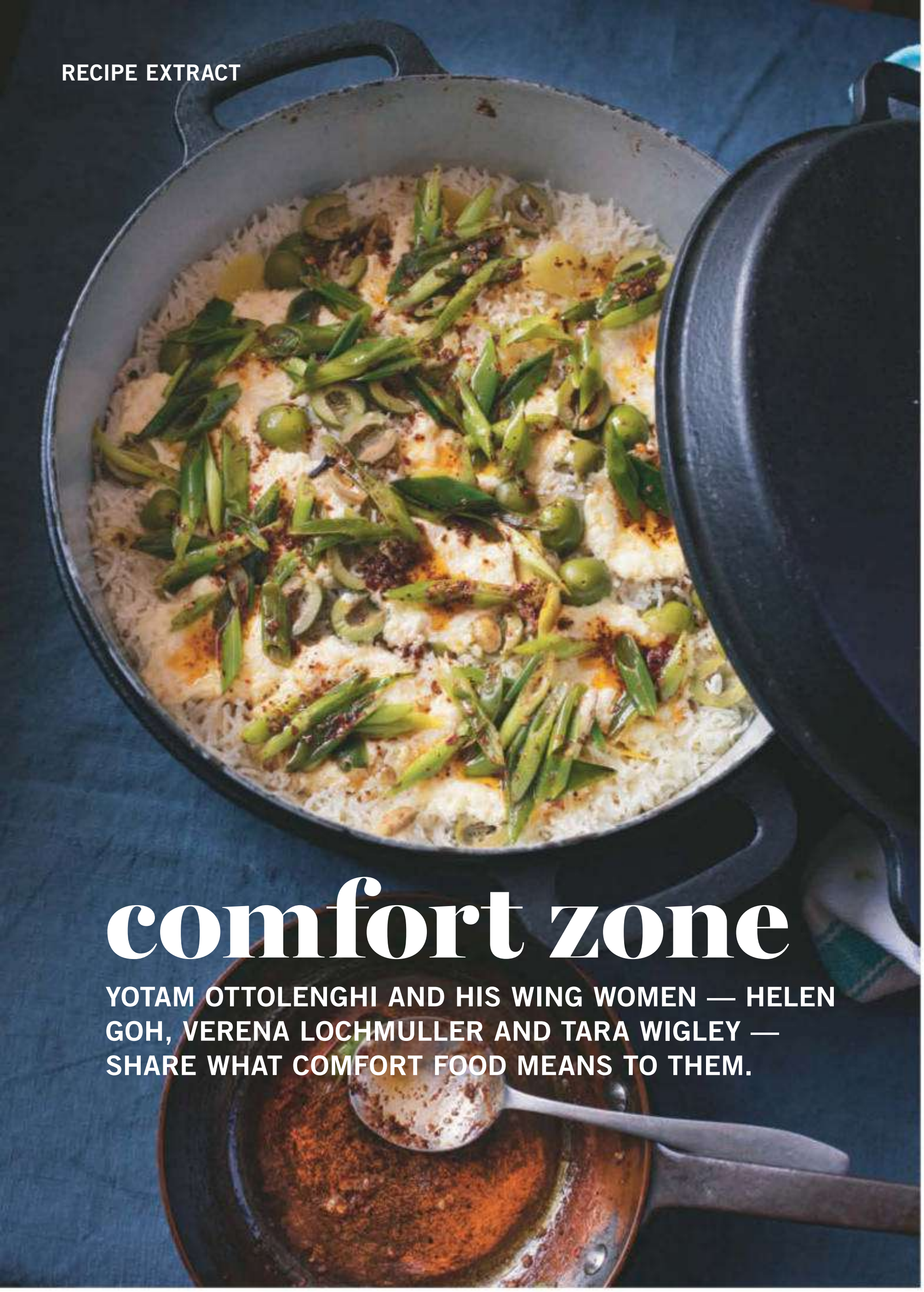
Insert hook under horizontal loop below top 2 strands of half treble.



Working from wrong side.



Working from right side.



comfort zone

YOTAM OTTOLENGHI AND HIS WING WOMEN — HELEN GOH, VERENA LOCHMULLER AND TARA WIGLEY — SHARE WHAT COMFORT FOOD MEANS TO THEM.

CHEESEBALL LEMON RICE WITH CHILLI BUTTER

SERVES 6

There's something really reassuring about a rice tray bake. Add the right amount of water, seal the dish well, pop it into the oven and forget about it. This is as comforting and delicious as you'd expect cheesy, briny, chilli-butter-doused rice to be. It's the perfect side to something simple like a roast chicken, or can be eaten as a main with some wilted greens.

GETTING AHEAD: The rice wants to be eaten fresh out of the oven but can be taken up to the point just before the hot water and aromatics are added, if you want to get ahead.

8 cloves
6 cardamom pods, bashed
1 lemon: shave the skin into strips, then juice to get 2 tablespoons
125g ricotta
150g feta, crumbled
125g hard mozzarella, grated
25g Parmesan, grated
1 egg, beaten
400g basmati rice, rinsed and drained well
75g pitted green olives, cut in half
100g unsalted butter
½ teaspoon chilli flakes
¾ teaspoon Aleppo chilli flakes
½ teaspoon sumac
5 green onions, sliced on the diagonal into 1cm pieces
50g salt

Preheat the oven to 200°C fan. Pour 750ml of water into a medium saucepan and add the cloves, cardamom pods, lemon strips and 1½ teaspoons of salt. Place on a medium-high heat, bring to a simmer, then remove from the heat.

Meanwhile, put the four cheeses and the egg into a medium bowl and mix well. Using your hands, divide the mixture into 12 portions and roll them roughly into balls, approximately 40g each. They don't need to be perfect, as they will spread once in the rice.

Scatter the rice on the bottom of a high-sided baking tray or dish, 24cm x 32cm (or a 28cm ovenproof sauté pan, for which you have a lid), and scatter over the olives. Pour over the hot water and aromatics. Shake the tray gently to spread the rice evenly, then deposit the cheese balls in the rice. Cover the tray tightly with foil (or lid), to keep the steam in, and bake for 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and leave to settle, covered, for 10 minutes.

While the rice is resting, melt the butter in a medium saucepan on a medium heat. Add the chilli flakes, Aleppo flakes and sumac and cook for 2–3 minutes. Add the green onions and cook for a further 20 seconds. Remove from the heat, add the lemon juice and set aside. Uncover the rice and spoon the chilli butter all over just before serving.

PUTTANESCA-STYLE SALMON BAKE

SERVES 4

If you make the tomato anchovy oil a day ahead here, you can then delight in the fact that a midweek supper can be on the table within 20 minutes. The fuss-free cooking method — all hail the tray bake — plus the dialled-up flavours — all hail puttanesca — makes such a winning combination.

200g fine green beans, trimmed
6 green onions, cut widthways into thirds
200g mixed cherry tomatoes, halved
6 (about 720g) skin-on salmon fillets
Salt and black pepper
TOMATO ANCHOVY OIL
85ml olive oil
8 (25g) anchovies, finely chopped
2½ tablespoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon chilli flakes
2 teaspoons coriander seeds, lightly bashed in a mortar
8 garlic cloves, very thinly sliced
2 preserved lemons, flesh and pips discarded, skin finely chopped
2 teaspoons maple syrup
SALSA
60g pitted Kalamata olives, halved
60g capers, roughly chopped
1 preserved lemon, flesh and pips discarded, skin thinly sliced
10g basil leaves, roughly chopped
10g parsley leaves, roughly chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons lemon juice

First, make the tomato anchovy oil. Put the oil, anchovies and tomato paste into a small sauté pan and place on a medium heat. Once the mixture starts to simmer, cook for 5 minutes, stirring from time to time. Add the chilli flakes and coriander seeds and cook for another minute, until fragrant. Remove from the heat and add the garlic, preserved lemon and maple syrup. Stir to combine, then set aside to cool.

Preheat the oven to 220°C fan. Place the beans, green onions and tomatoes on a large, baking paper-lined baking tray. Drizzle over 3 tablespoons of the tomato anchovy oil, along with ¼ teaspoon of salt and a good grind of pepper. Toss to combine and place in the oven for 12–13 minutes, until the beans and tomatoes are starting to soften and taking on a little colour. Meanwhile, arrange the salmon fillets on a plate and, using a spoon, drizzle the remaining tomato anchovy oil (as well as all the solids) evenly over the fillets. Once the beans and tomatoes have had their time in the oven, nestle the salmon fillets among them and bake for a further 8 minutes. Set aside for 5 minutes, out of the oven, to rest.

While the salmon is baking, mix all the ingredients for the salsa in a small bowl and season with a good grind of pepper. Spoon half the salsa over the salmon and serve the fish warm (or at room temperature, which works just as well) with the rest of the salsa in a bowl on the side.

CHOCOLATE RIPPLE FRIDGE CAKE

SERVES 8–10

As anyone who's ever been to an Australian barbecue will know, chocolate ripple cake is a ubiquitous, no-bake dessert. In Australia, it's made with shop-bought chocolate biscuits which are then sandwiched together with cream. The recipe is so simple that it's printed on the back of the biscuit packet! On a recent family trip back to Melbourne, Helen's kids were so taken by the cake that they begged her to make it back in London. Not being able to get hold of the right biscuits — Arnott's Choc Ripple — Helen made them from scratch. They're so quick and simple to bake that Helen now not only bakes them to make the cake but, also, makes extra biscuits to have around. No birthday party (or barbecue) is complete without them.

GETTING AHEAD: The biscuits can be made and baked up to 7 days in advance, kept in an airtight container.

The cake needs to be made up to 6 hours before serving, to allow it to soften and meld together, but can be made up to 2 days in advance, left to sit and wait in the fridge.

PLAYING AROUND: The strawberries work really well here but, as an alternative, just crumble over another cookie or a chocolate flake.

3 tablespoons milk (or 105ml if not using the Grand Marnier)
60ml Grand Marnier (if using)
1 (30ml) espresso shot, regular or decaf
650ml double cream
325g crème fraîche
50g icing sugar
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

BISCUITS

225g plain flour
50g cocoa powder
¾ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
¼ teaspoon salt
100g unsalted butter, at room temperature
200g caster sugar
50ml vegetable oil
50g golden syrup
1 egg

MACERATED STRAWBERRIES

600g strawberries, hulled and quartered
1½ tablespoons caster sugar
1 teaspoon finely shaved orange zest
2 tablespoons Grand Marnier (or orange juice)
2 strips of orange zest, julienned

First make the biscuits. Sift the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda and salt into a medium bowl. Place the butter, sugar, oil and golden syrup in the bowl of a stand mixer with the paddle attachment in place. Beat on a medium speed for 2 minutes, until light and creamy. Scrape the sides of the bowl, then add the egg and beat again until combined. Reduce the speed to low, add the dry ingredients and mix until the dough comes together. Wrap and chill in the fridge for at least 2 hours.

When ready to bake, preheat the oven to 170°C fan. Pinch off 30g pieces of dough and roll them into balls, then place them, spaced about 5cm apart, on two large baking-paper-lined baking trays. You should make about 23 balls. Flatten them with your hand — they should be about 5cm wide — then bake for 15 minutes, until firm and the tops are cracked or “rippled”. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for 5 minutes before transferring to a wire rack to cool completely.

When ready to assemble the cake, combine the milk, Grand Marnier (if using) and espresso and set aside. Place the cream, crème fraîche, icing sugar, vanilla extract and cinnamon in the bowl of the stand mixer with the whisk attachment in place. Whisk on a medium-high speed until soft peaks form: be careful not to overwhip, as the cream will thicken as you spread it. Transfer 200g of the mixture to a small bowl and refrigerate: this will be used to finish the cake. Pipe or dollop a roughly 30cm-long line (about 2cm wide) of the remaining cream mixture down the centre of a long cake plate or board. This is to help position the biscuits for assembly.

Take 20 of the biscuits and, working with one biscuit at a time, lightly brush both sides with the milk mixture: you want to just moisten the entire biscuit without drenching it. Then, using a small spatula or knife, spread 2 tablespoons of the cream on one side of the biscuit. Standing the biscuit upright, press it down on to one end of the strip of cream. Repeat with another biscuit, then place alongside the first biscuit, pressing to sandwich them together. Continue with the remaining biscuits to form a long log cake. Spread the remaining cream mixture over the top and sides of the log: don’t worry if it only barely covers the cake, as it will be topped up with the reserved cream the following day. Cover loosely and refrigerate for at least 6 hours or overnight.

About 15 minutes before you’re ready to serve, combine the strawberries in a bowl with the sugar, finely shaved orange zest and Grand Marnier. Leave to macerate for 10–15 minutes. Meanwhile, spread the reserved cream over the top and sides of the log.

When ready to serve, tumble about half the strawberries along the top of the cake, pressing them on slightly to help them stick. Drizzle any syrup over and around the plate. Finish with the orange zest strips on top. When serving, slice on the diagonal — warming the blade of the knife in a jug of hot water helps with the “cleanness” of the slice — to reveal the stripes. **AC**

Ottolenghi
COMFORT

This is an edited extract from *Ottolenghi Comfort*, Ebury Press, RRP $65. Photography Jonathan Lovekin.

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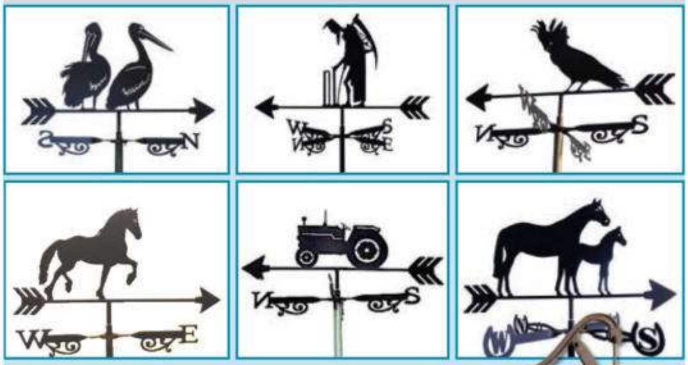

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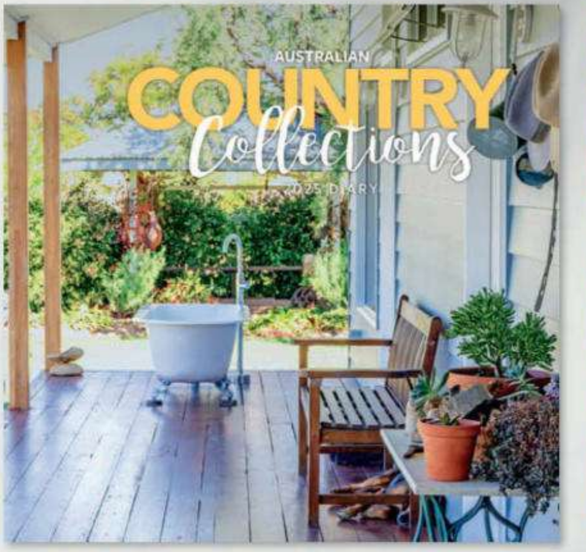
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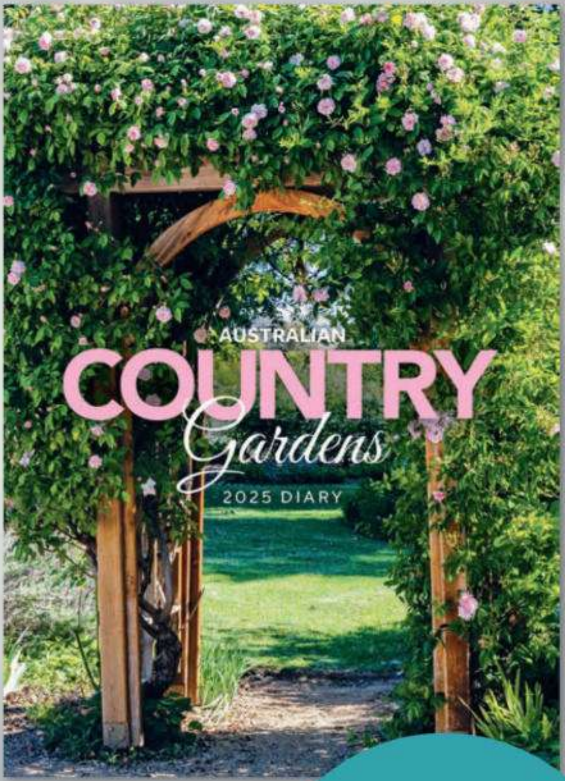
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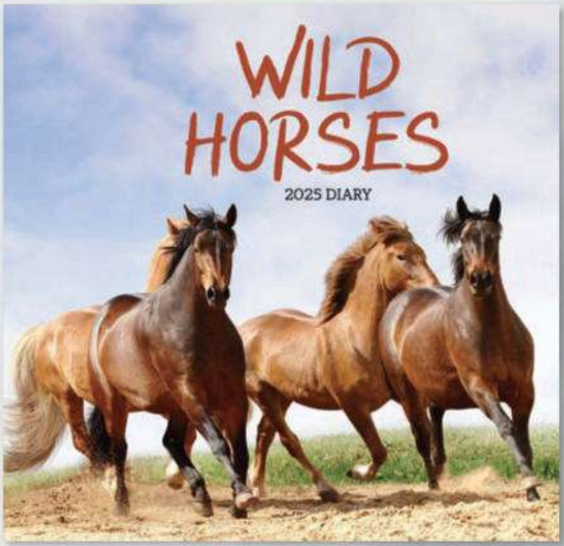
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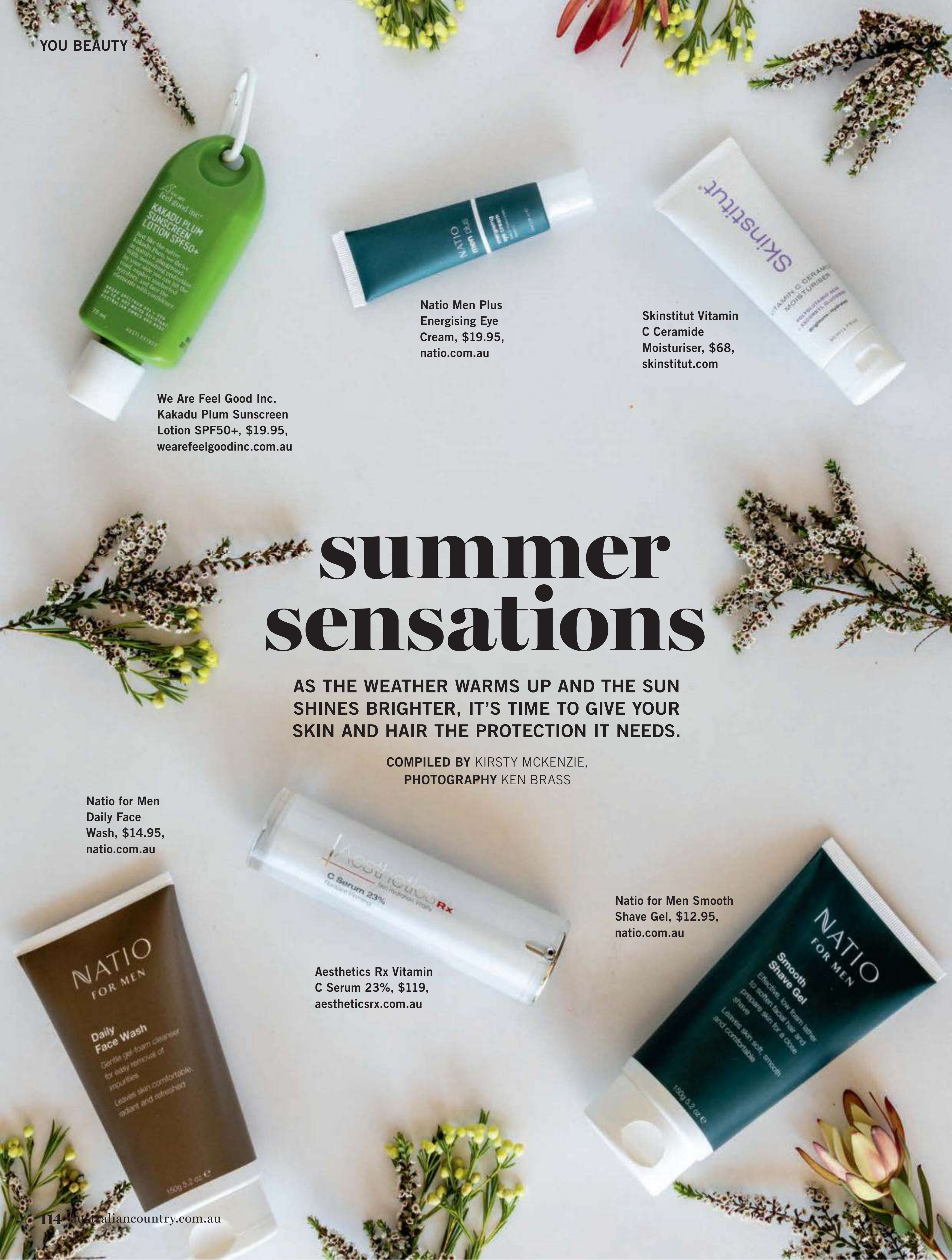

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COMPILED BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE,
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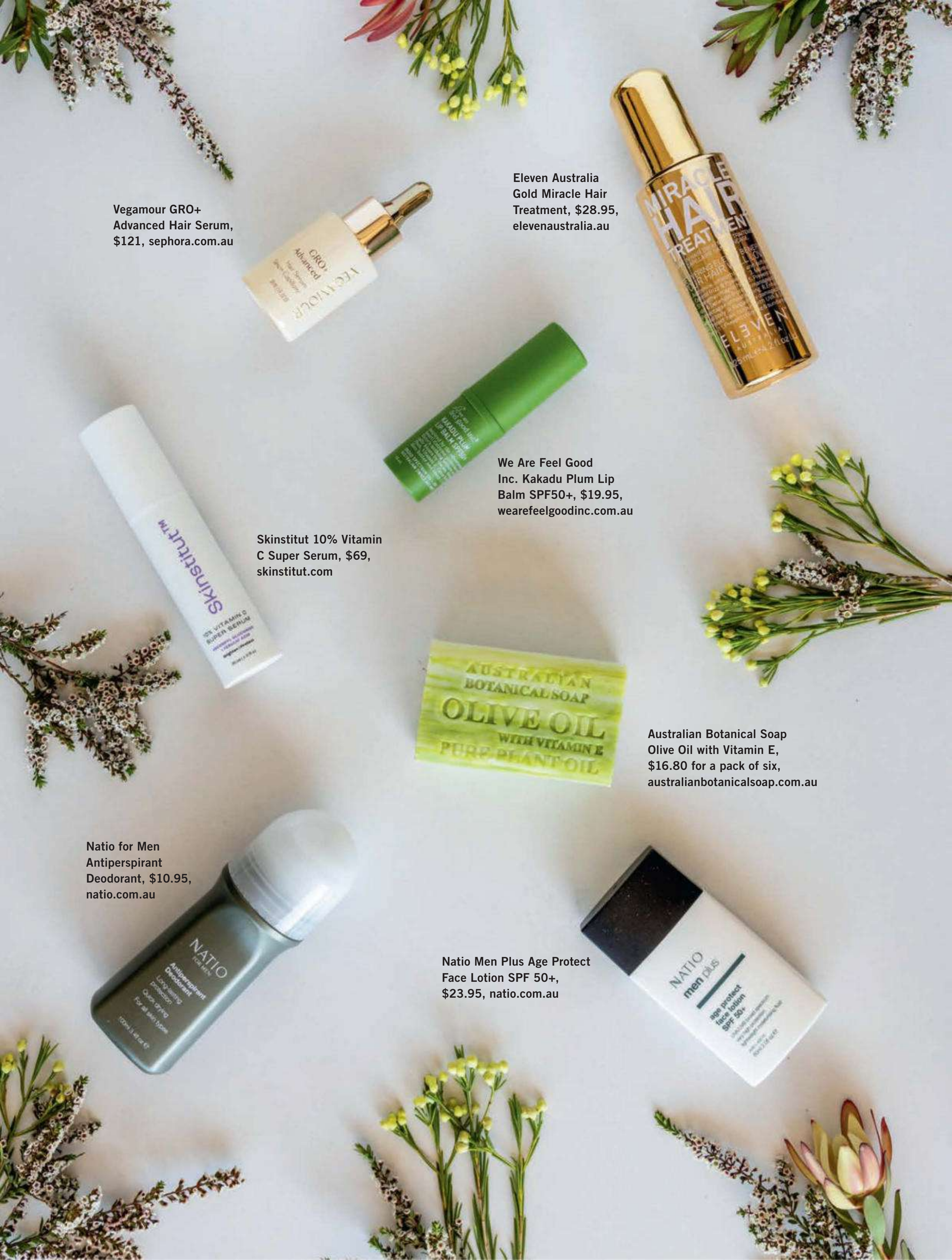
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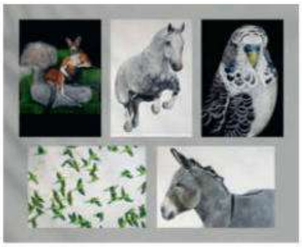


JILL BARBER RICHARDSON
Jill Barber Richardson, an Australian artist living with her family on a farm in western Victoria, is known for her large-scale animal portraits. She accepts commissions and exhibits her work. You can also own one of her fine pieces by purchasing a set of her art cards, $37.50. jbrart.com.au

THOMAS COOK
Thomas Cook's Macy bucket bag, $149.95, features contrast canvas and leather, is fully lined and includes a top magnetic tab closure, adjustable strap, internal zip and slip pockets, as well as a logo metal badge. thomascook.com.au

LOVE IN A BOTTLE
This travel-friendly perfume is reminiscent of beautiful and bright sunny mornings. Providing freshness and clarity throughout the day, Love in Happy combines fresh apple and plums with a floral heart composed of freesia, lily, rose and morning orchid. The non-toxic and vegan-friendly perfume, $24.99, is simply captivating. loveinabottle.com.au

GLENVIEW PRODUCTS
This large eagle weathervane, $770, is not just an ornament, it is a working instrument. Handcrafted in copper and brass, this model has a 65cm wingspan, however there are smaller and larger sizes also available. glenviewproducts.com.au

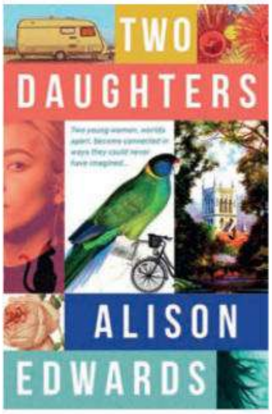
MASPORT HEATING
The Masport Heating range of outdoor fires has been designed and developed in Australia, for the Australian user. The portable folding Mawson campfire firepit, $240, is versatile in its foldable design, provides a heating and cooking solution away from home and produces less smoke through its optimised combustion and improved, cleaner burn. masportheating.com.au/en-au

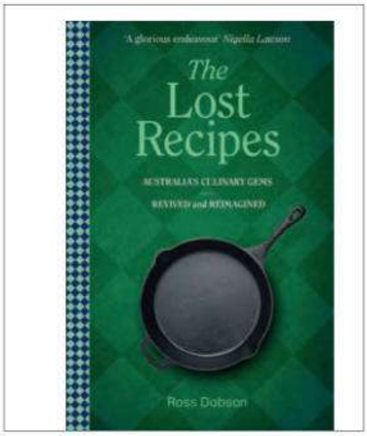
THOMAS COOK
The Thomas Cook Madison hat, $29.95, is made from paper straw and features a pleated hat band, grosgrain sweatband and Thomas Cook metal logo pin. It offers both style and sun protection, and is available in natural with a camel band or ivory with a navy band. thomascook.com.au

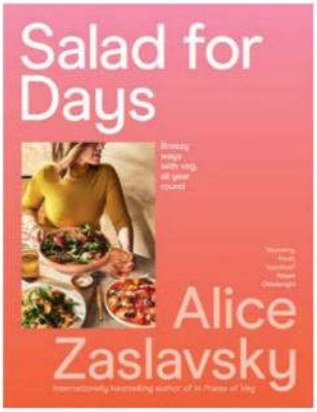
SMITTEN MERINO
Tasmanian clothing company Smitten Merino allows you to sleep in comfort and style with this nightshirt, $260, featuring beautiful, piped detailing, a convenient front pocket, and button-down front and long sleeves. Smitten Merino provides free shipping Australia-wide in compostable mailers. smittenmerino.com

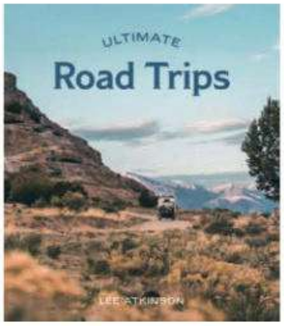
off the shelf

COMPILED BY KIRSTY MCKENZIE




'A glorious endeavour' Nigella Lawson
The Lost Recipes
AUSTRALIA'S CULINARY GEMS
REVIVED and REIMAGINED
Ross Dobson





TWO DAUGHTERS

Alison Edwards, Atlantic Books Australia, $32.99

Alison Edwards was raised on the south coast of NSW and completed a PhD in linguistics at Cambridge University before writing *Two Daughters*, her first novel, which cleverly manages to intertwine both worlds. Ava is raised in coastal NSW by a father who suffers from MS, lives in a caravan and is able to provide little but love. She heads to Sydney for uni where she manages to navigate her way to the UK courtesy of a scholarship. Laurie is also raised by her father, a Cambridge don, as her mother died in childbirth. Their worlds intersect in this intriguing tale of the ties that bind, privilege, or lack thereof, social justice and just a glimmer of hope for escaping all of it.

THE LOST RECIPES

Ross Dobson, Echo Publishing, $34.99

Chef and cookbook author Ross Dobson's hobby is scouring old journals, newspapers and books for Australia's "forgotten recipes". Some of the recipes he's unearthed — salad of iceberg lettuce, tomato and beetroot-pickled eggs with boiled salad dressing from 1935 Melbourne — seem entirely probable. Others — roast lamb with garlic from Gundagai in 1939, when surely garlic was regarded as a foreign threat — a bit unlikely. But chicken curry from Cowra in 1914, with green ginger, chilli and coconut milk, and steamed duck from 1929 Cairns using turmeric, green ginger AND chilli sound downright unlikely. They all add up to a fascinating collection, with more than a few culinary surprises.

SALAD FOR DAYS

Alice Zaslavsky, Murdoch Books, $45

The author of *In Praise of Veg*, Alice Zaslavsky, is back with her guide to elevating salad from the mundane accompaniment to a magnificent stand-alone star. From cauliflower tabouli with lemony tahini and pomegranate and cucumber corkscrews with gochujang dressing, to honeyed butternut risoni salad with marinated feta and agrodolce brassicas with macadamia cream, this book is packed with recipes to elevate your salad days to not-so humble.

ROAD TRIPS

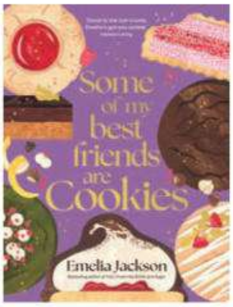
Lee Atkinson, Hardie Grant Explore, $45

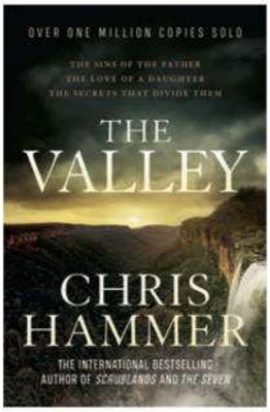
Australian travel writer Lee Atkinson has been writing about her adventures on and off the road for more than 30 years. She likes nothing better than a road trip and this book outlines 35 of her favourites around the globe. Each is accompanied by a route map, with details about when to travel, distances and driving tips for the regions, which range from Australia and New Zealand to Asia, UK, Europe and the Americas to Africa.

YOUR ASIAN VEGGIE PATCH

Connie Cao, Murdoch Books, $39.99

Connie Cao is a Melbourne-based





permaculture gardener and content creator. This book is both a guide to growing annuals and perennials that will thrive in a home garden and a cookbook, with a collection of recipes for using your home-grown (or market-sourced) Asian vegetables, herbs and fruit. From steamed eggplant with spicy sauce drizzle and homemade sambal, to cumquat and lavender iced tea, the book is brimming with inspiration.

SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE COOKIES

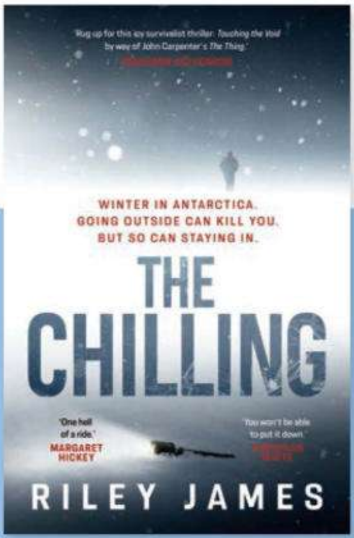
Emelia Jackson, Murdoch Books, $39.99

MasterChef alumnus and baker extraordinaire Emelia Jackson addresses the elephant in the room in her preamble: Yes, she is Australian and, yes, cookie is an American term. Much of this book is devoted to the soft, chewy version of deliciousness known as a cookie, though the odd crispy bickie gets a look in. From crumble-topped blueberry muffin-top cookies and passionfruit curd macadamia thumbprints, to raspberry rhubarb crumble bars and apricot pistachio crumble bars, this is definitely not a book to be browsed on an empty stomach.

THE VALLEY

Chris Hammer, Allen & Unwin, $34.99

A journalist for 30 years covering Australian politics and international affairs — so he knows a thing or two about intrigue — Chris Hammer leapt into the crime fiction world with his award-winning debut novel *Scrublands* in 2018. His work is imbued with a deep understanding of the Australian landscape and the people who inhabit it. His detectives Nell Buchanan and her superior, Ivan Lucic, are back in this work, which ducks and dives across three time frames and a cast of crooked lawyers, bent and straight cops, bullion thieves and the intergenerational impact of their deeds.



THE CHILLING

Riley James, Allen & Unwin, $32.99

Riley James was raised in north-west Tasmania, so she's no stranger to remote living. But nothing as remote as Antarctica, where this, her debut novel is set. *The Chilling* takes place over winter, where the scientists and researchers are confined to Macpherson station until the impenetrable sea ice melts when the weather warms up. A distress call leads to the discovery of a burning ship, with no sign of its crew apart from a sole survivor who has no recollection of how he got there or what happened. From there on, things at the base turn strange and it seems everybody is either hiding, or running from something, and could be a suspect in this intriguing page-turner.

mailbag

THANKS FOR BEING IN TOUCH. WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK.

AUSTRALIAN
COUNTRY
Real stories from the heartland
Down on the farm
Rachel Ward & Jill Bennett

LAST ISSUE GENERATED LOTS OF FEEDBACK FROM OUR READERS.

COLLECT OUR MILLS & BOON
50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITIONS
REUNION IN MARRIAGE
OUTBACK NURSE
COWBOY of Heart
GUARDED SECRETS
Modern
Medical
Western
Suspense
AVAILABLE NOW

WIN A PRIZE

We appreciate your thoughts and in each issue, one correspondent wins a prize. Simply email Kirsty at kmckenzie@umco.com.au or write to us at *Australian Country*, Locked Bag 154, North Ryde NSW 1670. We reserve the right to edit lengthy letters before publication. Our favourite correspondent next issue will win a quartet of 50th-anniversary novels from our friends at Mills & Boon. Just send us your thoughts on the magazine and life in general to be in the running for this wonderful prize.

BRICKBAT

I just bought the August/September *Australian Country*. Could you please explain why you are talking about winter in several places? Nice magazine but I was looking for spring inspiration. Quite confusing and I would appreciate comment.
Manon Saur, Shoalhaven Heads NSW

ED'S NOTE: *We appreciate all feedback, Manon. In some parts of the country, it's still quite chilly in these months. Plus, we occasionally have to deal with shipping and distribution issues, which delay on-sale dates. Thanks for bearing with us and taking the time to mail.*

BOUQUET

How truly refreshing to read Matilda Brown's story in your October/November issue. It was great to hear about her path to a healthier lifestyle and how it has created a new career and business for her and Scott. I hope her candour will inspire others to follow her example and try their meals and recipes.
Tracey Black, Port Macquarie NSW

YARRA INSPIRATION

Thanks so much for reminding us that there's so much more to the Yarra Valley than wineries and wine tastings. We really appreciate your recent travel story and particularly the lists at the end, which gave us so much inspiration that we're planning a visit.
Jack & Ella Able, Hobart Tas

And the winner is...

MANON SAUR, WHO WINS A FABULOUS BEACH BAG FROM OUR FRIENDS AT AMELIA LANE.

COUNTRY
Real stories from the heartland

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Australian Country Vol. 27.6 (No 168) is published by Universal Magazines, Unit 5, 6-8 Byfield Street, North Ryde NSW 2113. Phone: (02) 9805 0399, Fax: (02) 9805 0714. Melbourne office, Suite 4, Level 1, 150 Albert Road, South Melbourne Vic 3205. Phone (03) 9694 6444 Fax: (03) 9699 7890. Printed in Singapore by Times Printers, timesprinters.com. Distributed by Gordon and Gotch, Australia. Singapore — Car Kit Pte Ph 65 6 282 1960 magazines1source.com NZ Distributors: Needlecraft: (06) 356 4793, fax: (06) 355 4594, needlecraft.co.nz. Gordon and Gotch New Zealand: (09) 979 3018. This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the publishers. The publisher believes all the information supplied in this book to be correct at the time of printing. They are not, however, in a position to make a guarantee to this effect and accept no liability in the event of any information proving inaccurate. Prices, addresses and phone numbers were, after investigation and to the best of our knowledge and belief, up to date at the time of printing, but the shifting sands of time may change them in some cases. It is not possible for the publishers to ensure that advertisements which appear in this publication comply with the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 (Cth) and the Australian Consumer Law. The responsibility must therefore be on the person, company or advertising agency submitting the advertisements for publication. While every endeavour has been made to ensure complete accuracy, the publishers cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions.
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ISSN 1323-9708
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FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE ...

Our next issue's travels begin in south-western Queensland, where we caught up with the McKillop family on Avondale station near Cunnamulla. We've also travelled to the NSW south coast, where we met sculptors Rachel Burns and Ulan Murray, who live in a sustainable house they designed and built themselves. We've a garden feature from Manjimup in Western Australia's Southern Forests region and a profile on a Tasmanian farm. Our travel feature is a road trip up the east coast of Tasmania, where there are some remarkable places to stay, secluded beaches to explore and foodie haunts to discover. The issue is also packed with design and decorating inspiration, so please join us for

***AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY* 28.1,**
ON SALE AT THE BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY.

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